



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	04/28 L.A. virus cases, hospitalizations rising
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SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-04-28/l-a-coronavirus-cases-up-40-in-one-week-hospitalizations-rising-too
GIST	<p>Coronavirus cases in Los Angeles County rose by 40% over the past week and hospitalizations have started to creep up as well, underscoring how important it is for people to be up-to-date on their vaccines and boosters, as well as wear masks in indoor public settings, officials said.</p> <p>Although neither the number of infections nor the patient census are setting off alarm bells just yet, the trendlines illustrate that the county is contending with reinvigorated coronavirus transmission. And for county Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer, who called the increase in cases “pretty significant,” they reinforce the importance of taking individual actions to thwart the spread.</p> <p>“Since the beginning of the pandemic, we’ve all had to make choices about how to best protect ourselves and others from COVID-19,” she told reporters Thursday. “With cases on the rise, the potential for more contagious variants and lots of opportunities to be exposed, this is a great time to make a choice to get vaccinated or boosted and to wear a mask or respirator when you’re indoors and around others.”</p> <p>Over the last week, L.A. County has reported an average of about 1,764 new coronavirus cases per day — up from 1,261 a week ago.</p> <p>The latest number is double the 879 cases a day L.A. County was reporting in early April.</p> <p>On a per capita basis, the county’s case rate has risen to 122 cases a week for every 100,000 residents. L.A. County’s case rate exceeded 100 over the weekend, meaning the nation’s most populous county is again experiencing a high rate of transmission for the first time since early March.</p> <p>Perhaps more concerning, the number of coronavirus-positive patients hospitalized countywide has also risen this week following months of steady decline.</p> <p>On Wednesday, 249 such individuals were hospitalized countywide. Five days earlier, on Friday, the count was 209: the lowest single-day total for the county since the pandemic began, state data show.</p> <p>Since the emergence of the highly infectious Omicron variant of the coronavirus in December, officials have noted that many infections have tended to result in relatively mild illness — forging an environment where case counts were sky high, but the share of people being hospitalized with COVID-19 was lower than in the pandemic’s previous waves.</p> <p>For instance, during the peak of the winter Omicron wave, 1.2% of coronavirus cases in L.A. County were hospitalized; by contrast, during last summer’s Delta wave, 5.6% of cases were hospitalized.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the sheer infectivity of Omicron stretched some hospitals throughout the state to their limit. And in the months since the last surge subsided, new even-more-contagious subvariants of Omicron have emerged — including BA.2 and, more recently, BA.2.12.1.</p> <p>BA.2 is the primary culprit behind the uptick in cases in L.A. County, accounting for at least 88% of cases here, officials say.</p> <p>BA.2.12.1 has spawned similar increases elsewhere in the U.S., and accounts for a majority of coronavirus cases in New York and New Jersey. California officials have projected that BA.2.12.1 will also account for a majority of coronavirus cases in California within a few days, according to Ferrer.</p> <p>BA.2.12.1 is estimated to be 25% more contagious than BA.2.</p> <p>“With that growth advantage, it could quickly become the dominant strain across the United States,” Ferrer said.</p>

Ferrer said she hopes cases will stabilize fairly soon, especially if more people get vaccinated and boosted. But trends on the East Coast are concerning, where Ferrer said there is “a significant rise now in hospitalizations” and there is still much to learn about BA.2.12.1.

“So let’s continue to be cautious,” Ferrer said.

There are a number of data points that provide reason for some concern:

Wastewater: Coronavirus levels detected [through wastewater surveillance](#) have nearly doubled across large swaths of the county over a two-week period, including sewage systems that serve the city of Los Angeles and southern and eastern parts of L.A. County.

Vulnerable settings: There were 10 outbreaks at sites serving people experiencing homelessness, and six at nursing homes from April 20 to 26, an increase from prior weeks.

Workplaces: The number of worksites seeing clusters of coronavirus cases has doubled compared with the prior week. Between April 20 and 26, there were 82 worksites affected. The most common sites were in manufacturing, retail, information, food and beverage, electronics and appliance, transportation equipment and manufacturing, and the film and sound recording industries.

K-12 schools: Outbreaks are up in K-12 classrooms, and for the first time in long while, some have involved dozens of students, Ferrer said. From April 13 to 19, there were six new classroom outbreaks — all in elementary schools — and double what was seen the prior week. Ferrer says that when there are eight to 14 new outbreaks in K-12 classroom settings in a week, that’s reason for a medium level of concern.

Test positivity rates: The percentage of coronavirus tests coming back positive in K-12 settings, while remaining low, has started to increase in the past two weeks, Ferrer said. Also, “the number of [coronavirus] cases reported in students in elementary schools, middle schools and high schools more than doubled” between late March and mid-April, Ferrer said.

These clusters illustrate why health officials still [strongly recommend masking](#) while in indoor public settings, including schools.

Mask use is required on public transit and in airports in L.A. County, including Los Angeles International Airport, Hollywood Burbank Airport and [Long Beach Airport](#). A similar mask requirement was adopted Thursday by the [BART](#) commuter rail system in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Vaccinations remain the best way to guard against severe illness and death, Ferrer said. Those vaccinated are 4½ times less likely to be hospitalized and nine times less likely to die than those unvaccinated, Ferrer said. Vaccinated people are almost two times less likely to get infected than those who aren’t.

Continuing to get booster shots also remains important, Ferrer added, because immunity from natural infection and prior vaccinations weakens over time.

“With continued circulation of easily transmissible variants, our immune systems will need to be boosted,” Ferrer said.

In addition, “people with risk factors ... are at increased risk for severe disease from re-infection,” CDC scientist Dr. Kristie Clarke said at a [briefing](#) Tuesday.

Ferrer also urged that parents get children vaccinated. Only 32% of children ages 5 to 11 have completed their primary vaccination series in L.A. County, compared with 78% of adolescents ages 12 to 17.

By contrast, 91% of L.A. County’s seniors 65 and older have completed their primary vaccination series.

“Although most children aren’t likely to have severe illness from COVID, some do become very ill and develop long COVID,” Ferrer said. “And children are easily able to spread the virus to others and some of those other people have become severely ill.”

Otherwise healthy children are also suffering from severe COVID-19, Ferrer said, citing [data](#) that 3 out of 10 children ages 5 to 11 who were hospitalized with COVID-19 had no underlying health conditions. Nine out of 10 children in this age group hospitalized with COVID-19 were unvaccinated.

Tens of thousands of children nationally have been hospitalized with COVID-19, and more than 900 have died since the start of the pandemic. “There aren’t almost any other infectious diseases circulating in the United States that causes many children to pass away, amplifying the need for us to do everything we can to reduce this unbearable tragedy,” Ferrer said.

Even if children have already survived a coronavirus infection and develop some immunity, “we can’t predict how strong or long that protection will be,” Ferrer said. “Vaccinations ... are the best and safest choice for building and protecting immunity.”

Ferrer said the number of reported infections still remains an important indicator of where the pandemic is heading. It’s not a guarantee that the coronavirus is now destined to mainly result in milder illness, she said.

“With so many new variants cropping up, we just don’t know whether or not we’re really on this trajectory where all we’re going to see is milder and milder illness,” Ferrer said.

“And I would just suggest that we not guess on this — be overly optimistic — that we, in fact, recognize that this is a virus that mutates both fairly rapidly, but also fairly dramatically,” Ferrer said. “You don’t want unchecked transmission, which leads to the possibility of more variants of concern.”

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HEADLINE	04/29 South Africa faces 5th Covid wave
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africa-may-be-entering-fifth-covid-wave-health-minister-2022-04-29/
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG, April 29 (Reuters) - South Africa may be entering a fifth COVID wave earlier than expected after a sustained rise in infections over the past 14 days that seems to be driven by the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron sub-variants, health officials and scientists said on Friday.</p> <p>The country that has recorded the most coronavirus cases and deaths on the African continent only exited a fourth wave around January and had predicted a fifth wave could start in May or June, early in the southern hemisphere winter.</p> <p>Health Minister Joe Phaahla told a briefing that although hospitalisations were picking up there was so far no dramatic change in admissions to intensive care units or deaths.</p> <p>He said at this stage health authorities had not been alerted to any new variant, other than changes to the dominant one circulating, Omicron.</p> <p>Infectious disease specialist Richard Lessells told the same briefing that waning immunity from previous waves could be contributing to the earlier-than-expected resurgence in cases.</p> <p>He said the rising share of infections attributed to the BA.4 and BA.5 sub-lineages of Omicron suggested they had a growth advantage over other Omicron sub-variants like BA.2.</p> <p>But so far there was no sign that BA.4 and BA.5 were causing significantly more severe disease, said Waasila Jassat from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.</p>

	<p>South Africa has reported more than 3.7 million COVID cases and over 100,000 deaths during the pandemic. On Thursday, the WHO's Africa office flagged the rise in South Africa's infections as the main driver of an uptick on the African continent.</p> <p>Senior health official Nicholas Crisp also said on Friday that the country had enough vaccine doses and was not planning to procure more. He added the government was not intending to buy Pfizer's (PFE.N) COVID treatment pill Paxlovid for public sector patients, partly because it was very expensive.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Sweden PM: immigrant integration failed
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swedish-pm-says-integration-immigrants-has-failed-fueled-gang-crime-2022-04-28/
GIST	<p>STOCKHOLM, April 28 (Reuters) - Sweden has failed to integrate the vast numbers of immigrants it has taken in over the past two decades, leading to parallel societies and gang violence, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said on Thursday, as she launched a series of initiatives to combat organised crime.</p> <p>Many Swedes were shocked earlier this month after violent riots left more than 100 police injured. The violence erupted after a Swedish-Danish politician burned the Quran at a rally and sought to hold more in several immigrant-dominated neighborhoods.</p> <p>Andersson blamed criminals and said both Islamism and right-wing extremism had been allowed to fester in Sweden, in unusually frank and self-critical comments.</p> <p>"Segregation has been allowed to go so far that we have parallel societies in Sweden. We live in the same country but in completely different realities," Andersson told a news conference.</p> <p>The number of people in Sweden born abroad has doubled in the last two decades to 2 million, or a fifth of the population. Andersson's Social Democrats have been in power for 28 of the last 40 years, including the last eight.</p> <p>Andersson said she wanted to introduce local youth crime boards where social services and police could collaborate. She also proposed tools to make sure that youths stayed in schools and off the streets without the consent of parents.</p> <p>"Integration has been too poor at the same time as we have had a large immigration. Society has been too weak, resources for the police and social services have been too weak," she said.</p> <p>Sweden, which holds a general election later this year, has radically tightened its immigration policies since taking in more people per capita than any other European Union country during the migration crisis in 2015. It now has one of the bloc's most restrictive policies.</p> <p>Human rights organisation Amnesty International has been critical of Sweden's tightening of policies, claiming it is causing human suffering and making integration even harder for immigrants.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 CAR: rebel attack kills 6 soldiers
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/six-soldiers-killed-central-african-republic-rebel-attack-2022-04-29/
GIST	<p>BANGUI, April 29 (Reuters) - Rebels killed at least six soldiers in an attack on Thursday on a military outpost in southeast Central African Republic, the latest reported incident in a decade-long conflict, a local official and a hospital director said on Friday.</p> <p>Members of an alliance of armed groups known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) assaulted a military camp on the outskirts of Bakouma town early on Thursday morning, said a local government official who did not wish to be named for security reasons.</p>

	<p>Six soldiers and four rebels were killed, he said.</p> <p>The attack was confirmed by the head of a hospital in the nearby city of Bangassou, also on condition of anonymity, where bodies and wounded soldiers were taken.</p> <p>Mineral-rich Central African Republic has been mired in violence since a coalition of mainly Muslim Seleka rebels ousted then-president Francois Bozize in 2013, sparking reprisals from mostly Christian militias.</p> <p>In recent years the army - backed by United Nations peacekeepers, Russian and Rwandan troops - has been battling CPC militants seeking to overturn the outcome of an election in December 2020 that saw President Faustin-Archange Touadera clinch a second term.</p> <p>The U.N. has accused all parties of abuses including summary killings, torture, conflict-related sexual violence and the use of child fighters among others.</p> <p>It has lost over 160 peacekeepers in a conflict that has displaced more than 1 million people.</p> <p>A Special Criminal Court set up in 2015 to prosecute war crimes committed in the country kicked off its first trial last week.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 Inflation record high for Euro-nations
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-europe-prices-inflation-a39872e7f3097d3b55a3218ca6a6802a
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — Inflation hit a record in April for the 19 countries that use the euro as skyrocketing fuel prices boosted by the war in Ukraine weigh on the region's economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Annual inflation reached 7.5% for the month, topping the old record of 7.4% from March, statistics agency Eurostat said Friday. The April figure was the sixth consecutive record reported for the eurozone.</p> <p>Eurostat said energy prices jumped 38%, an indication of how Russia's invasion of Ukraine is affecting the eurozone's 343 million people. The jump in European prices reflects some of the same factors that pushed U.S. annual inflation to 8.5% in March, the highest since 1981.</p> <p>Fears that the war may lead to an interruption of oil or gas supplies from Russia, the world's largest oil exporter, have pushed up prices for oil and natural gas. The uncertainty comes on top of rebounding global demand during the recovery from the pandemic and a cautious approach to increasing production from oil cartel OPEC and allied countries, including Russia.</p> <p>Bottlenecks in supplies of raw materials and parts have also contributed to higher prices.</p> <p>Governments as well as households are feeling the effects of high inflation. Germany is dropping a charge for supporting renewable energy on electric bills, saving a family of four around 300 euros (\$317) a year. Germany's IG Metall industrial union is proposing an 8.2% annual increase for the country's steelworkers going into wage talks.</p> <p>French right-wing leader Marine Le Pen made inflation a key issue in her unsuccessful challenge to President Emmanuel Macron in France's presidential election this month.</p> <p>Worries about even higher heating, electricity and auto fuel prices are one factor holding back European governments from deciding to halt energy imports from Russia as part of the sanctions over the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine.</p>

	<p>“The war in Ukraine is a major setback for the eurozone’s economic recovery,” said Tej Parikh, director in Fitch Ratings’ economics team.</p> <p>Inflation is also putting uncomfortable pressure on the European Central Bank to look at raising interest rates from record lows in coming months. Higher rates to quell inflation could also weigh on a recovery that has been shaken by the energy crunch, the war, and the latest outbreaks of COVID-19.</p> <p>Eurostat said economic growth slowed to 0.2% in the first three months of the year as voluntary and government restrictions during the spread of the highly contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus joined with higher inflation to hold back demand as people made less use of in-person services. The first quarter figure was down from 0.3% in the last three months of 2021.</p> <p>Among major European economies, Germany grew 0.2%, avoiding a recession after output fell 0.3% at the end of 2021. France stagnated at zero growth as government restrictions during the omicron wave hurt activity. Italy’s economy shrank 0.2% as exports declined.</p> <p>The war, which started Feb. 24, more than halfway through the quarter, is likely to weigh on growth during the coming months.</p> <p>“Rising inflation and the fallout from the Ukraine war mean that GDP is likely to contract” in the second quarter, “while April’s further big increase in core inflation strengthens the case for a July rate hike” by the ECB, Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics, said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 New gas pipeline redraws EU energy map
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-covid-health-business-germany-274aae7fd9dfa88bab1dd26200db9423
GIST	<p>ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Mountainous and remote, the Greek-Bulgaria border once formed the southern corner of the Iron Curtain. Today, it’s where the European Union is redrawing the region’s energy map to ease its heavy reliance on Russian natural gas.</p> <p>A new pipeline — built during the COVID-19 pandemic, tested and due to start commercial operation in June — would ensure that large volumes of gas flow between the two countries in both directions to generate electricity, fuel industry and heat homes.</p> <p>The energy link takes on greater importance following Moscow’s decision this week to cut off natural gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria over a demand for payments in rubles stemming from Western sanctions over the war of Ukraine.</p> <p>The 180-kilometer (110-mile) pipeline project is the first of several planned gas interconnectors that would give eastern European Union members and countries hoping to join the 27-nation bloc access to the global gas market.</p> <p>In the short term, it’s Bulgaria’s backup.</p> <p>The new pipeline connection, called the Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria, will give the country access to ports in neighboring Greece that are importing liquefied natural gas, or LNG, and also will bring gas from Azerbaijan through a new pipeline system that ends in Italy.</p> <p>It’s one of many efforts as EU members scramble to edit their energy mixes, with some reverting back to emissions-heavy coal while also planning expanded output from renewables.</p> <p>Germany, the world’s biggest buyer of Russian energy, is looking to build LNG import terminals that would take years. Italy, another top Russian gas importer, has reached deals with Algeria, Azerbaijan, Angola and Congo for gas supplies.</p>

The European Union wants to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas by two-thirds this year and to eliminate it completely over five years through alternative sources, the use of wind and solar power, and conservation.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is likely to accelerate changes in the EU's long-term strategy as the bloc adapts to energy that is more expensive but also more integrated among member nations, said Simone Tagliapietra, an energy expert at the Brussels-based think tank Bruegel.

"It's a new world," he said. "And in this new world, it's clear that Russia doesn't want to be part of an international order as we think of it."

Tagliapietra added: "The strategy — particularly by Germany — over the last 50 years was always one of engaging with Russia on energy. ... But given what we are seeing in Ukraine and given Russia's view of international relations, it's not the kind of country with which we would like to do business."

EU policymakers argue that while Eastern European members are among the most dependent on Russian gas, the size of their markets makes the problem manageable. Bulgaria imported 90% of its gas from Russia but only consumes 3 billion cubic meters annually — 30 times less than lead consumer Germany, according to 2020 data from EU statistics agency Eurostat.

The Greece-Bulgaria pipeline will complement the existing European network, much of which dates to the Soviet era, when Moscow sought badly needed funds for its faltering economy and Western suppliers to help build its pipelines.

The link will run between the northeastern Greek city of Komotini and Stara Zagora, in central Bulgaria, and will give Bulgaria and neighbors with new grid connections access to the expanding global gas market.

That includes a connection with the newly built Trans Adriatic Pipeline, which carries gas from Azerbaijan, and suppliers of liquefied natural gas that arrives by ship, likely to include Qatar, Algeria and the United States.

As many as eight additional interconnectors could be built in Eastern Europe, reaching as far as Ukraine and Austria.

The 240 million-euro (\$250 million) pipeline will carry 3 billion cubic meters of gas per year, with an option to be expanded to 5 billion. It received funding from Bulgaria, Greece and the EU, and has strong political support from Brussels and the United States.

On the ground, the project faced multiple holdups because of supply chain snags during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Receiving specialized parts and moving personnel after construction got underway in early 2020 soon became increasingly difficult, said Antonis Mitzalis, executive director of Greek contractor AVAX, which oversaw the project.

Construction of the pipeline finished in early April, he said, while work and testing at two metering stations and software installation are in the final stages.

"We had a sequence in mind. But the fact that some materials did not arrive made us rework that sequence, sometimes with a cost effect," Mitzalis said.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis missed a tour of the site last month after contracting COVID-19. He spoke Wednesday with his Bulgarian counterpart, Kiril Petkov, to provide assurances of Greek support.

	“Bulgaria and Greece will continue to work together for energy security and diversification — of strategic importance for both countries and the region,” Petkov later tweeted. “We both are confident for the successful completion of the IGB on time.”
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HEADLINE	04/29 Racial split on Covid restrictions endures
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-pandemics-public-race-and-ethnicity-6d512d62a6aadf9f1777bc4a4e0f29a9
GIST	<p>Black and Hispanic Americans remain far more cautious in their approach to COVID-19 than white Americans, recent polls show, reflecting diverging preferences on how to deal with the pandemic as federal, state and local restrictions fall by the wayside.</p> <p>Despite majority favorability among U.S. adults overall for measures like mask mandates, public health experts said divided opinions among racial groups reflect not only the unequal impact of the pandemic on people of color but also apathy among some white Americans.</p> <p>Black Americans (63%) and Hispanic Americans (68%) continue to be more likely than white Americans (45%) to say they are at least somewhat worried about themselves or a family member being infected with COVID-19, according to an April poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.</p> <p>Throughout the pandemic, Black and Hispanic communities have experienced higher rates of illness and death from COVID, said Amelia Burke-Garcia, public health program area director at NORC. Those experiences have resulted in greater levels of stress, anxiety and awareness of the risks of catching COVID-19, she said, which means people of color are more likely to feel measures like mask mandates are needed.</p> <p>“We’ve seen these trends endure throughout the entire pandemic,” Burke-Garcia said. “What we’re seeing now as mitigation measures are being rolled back is there’s still great concern amongst Black Americans and Hispanic Americans around the risk of getting sick.”</p> <p>Seventy-one percent of Black Americans say they favor requiring face masks for people traveling on airplanes, trains and other types of public transportation. That’s more than the 52% of white Americans who support mask mandates for travelers; 29% of white Americans are opposed. Among Hispanic Americans, 59% are in favor and 20% are opposed. The poll was conducted before a ruling by a federal judge scuttled the government’s mask mandate for travelers.</p> <p>In Indiana, Tuwanna Plant said she sees fewer and fewer people wearing masks in public, even though she said she has been diligent in always wearing one. Plant, who is Black, said she sees people treating the pandemic like it’s over, and she wants the mask mandate to continue.</p> <p>Plant, a 46-year-old sous chef, said she had some concerns about getting the vaccine and took every other precaution, such as cleaning and masking, to avoid getting sick but recently was hospitalized for COVID-19.</p> <p>The experience scared her — she has a preexisting lung condition, and knew family members who died from COVID-19. She said she plans to get vaccinated as soon as she can.</p> <p>“I called my children while I was in the emergency room,” Plant said. “I didn’t know ... if it was going to get better or worse, I didn’t know. So it was the experience for me altogether.”</p> <p>Dr. Celine Gounder, an infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist and editor-at-large at Kaiser Health News, said people’s lived experiences deeply shape how they perceive the pandemic. Anecdotes</p>

and personal experience can have a larger impact on behavior than numbers, she said, and people of color are more likely to have had negative experiences with health care prior to and during the pandemic.

While new medicines and vaccines have made it easier to treat COVID-19, Gounder said many people still face systemic barriers to accessing that medical care. Others risk losing their jobs or are unable to take time off if they do fall ill, she said, or cannot avoid things like public transit to reduce their exposures.

“When people argue that they don’t have to mask on the plane, that means something very different for someone who has access to all of these new innovations than it does for somebody who has no health insurance, who struggles to care for an elderly parent and their children, who’s maybe a single mom working in a job where she has no paid sick and family medical leave,” Gounder said. “It’s just a completely different calculation.”

In January, an AP-NORC poll showed Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely than white Americans to feel certain things would be essential for getting back to life without feeling at risk of infection. For example, 76% of Black Americans and 55% of Hispanic Americans said it was essential for getting back to normal that most people regularly wear face masks in public indoor places, compared with 38% of white Americans.

Last month, an AP-NORC poll showed Black and Hispanic Americans, 69% and 49%, were more likely than white Americans, 35%, to say they always or often wear a face mask around others.

Lower support for mask mandates and other precautions among white Americans may also reflect less sensitivity towards what occurs in communities of color. In a 2021 study of mask wearing during the early part of the pandemic, researchers found that mask wearing among white people increased when white people were dying at greater rates in the surrounding community. When Black and Hispanic people were dying, mask usage was lower.

Berkeley Franz, a co-author of the paper, said that in addition to residential segregation that separates white people from communities of color, past research has shown that white people can display ambivalence toward policies that they believe mostly help people of color.

“Anti-Blackness is really pervasive and has tremendous consequences, both in terms of the policies that get passed, and what doesn’t,” Franz said. “White people can still have really racist actions without seeing themselves that way and understanding the consequences. It’s largely below the surface and unintentional but has tremendous consequences in terms of equity.”

Communities of color also have a different perception of risk from the pandemic than their white counterparts, said Michael Niño, a sociology professor at the University of Arkansas who co-authored a paper on race, gender and masking in the pandemic.

“Masking is something that is relatively cheap, it’s effective, and it’s something that can be easily done,” he said. “It doesn’t require any sort of governmental response. These broader histories of racism and sexism in the United States are most certainly shaping some of the patterns we’re seeing.”

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HEADLINE	04/29 Political stakes high in Beijing outbreak
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-business-shanghai-beijing-172b7ef4b401adc7781486816e89248a
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — Classes suspended. Buildings and communities sealed off. Mass testing of residents. A rush to stock up on food, just in case.</p> <p>Beijing, China’s sprawling capital, is starting to resemble other Chinese cities grappling with the latest wave of the omicron variant of the coronavirus.</p>

Authorities are moving quickly to try to prevent a massive COVID-19 outbreak that could trigger a citywide lockdown like the one that has paralyzed Shanghai for more than three weeks. The political stakes are high as the ruling Communist Party prepares for a major congress this fall at which President Xi Jinping is seeking a third five-year term to reassert his position as China's unquestioned leader.

Xi and the party's main policymaking body, the Politburo, reaffirmed their commitment to a "zero-COVID" policy on Friday, putting China at odds with much of the world. While many countries are dropping restrictions and trying to live with the virus, China is keeping its international borders largely shut and closing off entire cities to all but essential travel.

The Politburo acknowledged the economic cost of lockdowns, saying efforts must be made to "minimize the impact of the epidemic on economic and social development," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Despite the toll on the economy and everyday life, the zero-COVID approach is extolled by the Communist Party as a virtuous display of self-sacrifice under the slogan "Persistence is victory." Officials frequently point out China's relatively low death toll and have accused the U.S. and other countries of essentially giving up.

Li Bin, a vice minister of China's National Health Commission, cited China's vast population and insufficient medical resources.

"If the COVID response loosens to let the virus run free, it will definitely lead to a huge number of infections in a short period of time and a large number of severe and mortal cases," Li said at a media briefing Friday.

Shanghai reported 52 more deaths on Thursday, bringing the toll to 337 in its ongoing outbreak. Liang Wannian, the head of China's COVID-19 expert team, told the briefing there have been signs of improvement in Shanghai, but the situation remains serious. The city recorded about 15,000 cases on Thursday, accounting for the vast majority nationwide.

Beijing's strategy of early testing and isolation appears to be working so far. About 200 cases and no deaths have been reported since the outbreak started a week ago, though the daily number of new cases has crept up to nearly 50.

"I think Beijing can do better than other cities because Beijing is the capital city of China," said community worker Liu Xuan. "And my work is related to virus control and prevention so I feel confident."

A botched response to the Beijing outbreak may not impact Xi's plans for a third term, but it could dent the party's reputation and with it, Xi's room for maneuver on issues such as personnel appointments, experts said.

"Even if Xi Jinping himself is untouchable, a widespread sense of failure and disappointment is bad for a congress year," said Joseph Torigian, a Chinese politics expert at American University in Washington, D.C.

The pomp and circumstance in the run-up and during the meeting would contrast with the frustration, he said.

Liang, the COVID-19 expert team head, said citywide lockdowns can be avoided if early detection, reporting, isolation and treatment are done well. "Fighting omicron ... does not necessarily mean locking down the entire city," he said.

What remains unclear is whether the highly contagious variant will breach Beijing's defenses, and whether containment measures will be enforced in a way that minimizes disruption to daily life and the work of government and businesses.

Beijing is taking no chances. The government ordered the indefinite closure of schools and three rounds of testing of virtually all the capital's 21 million residents this week. When cases are uncovered, entire buildings and sometime neighborhoods are locked down.

Residents have generally complied with the demands, joining long lines for testing and food, some stretching outside supermarkets this week.

The cautionary tale for Beijing is Shanghai, China's largest city, where millions of residents have been under a lockdown for more than three weeks. Food has run low at times and heavy-handed enforcement and a lack of preparation have prompted heavy criticism, despite government efforts to censor it.

Images online have shown residents grappling with police and confronting health workers, kicking at barriers, screaming off their balconies and banging pots and pans to show their frustration.

The lockdown has dealt a blow to the economy at a time when growth was already slowing. The International Monetary Fund has reduced its forecast of Chinese growth this year to 4.4% because of the shutdowns of Shanghai and other industrial centers. That would be down from 8.1% growth last year and below the Communist Party's 5.5% target.

Liang said the short-term pain would be exchanged for long-term returns to normal production, life and economic development. "I think this is cost-effective and is also a kind of balance," Liang said.

Yu Changping, a doctor of respiratory medicine at People's Hospital of Wuhan University, concurred.

"Inconvenience to people's life or economic impact is the pain we have to suffer and a price we have to pay," Yu said. "But if we fail to prevent the spread of the virus, we will suffer heavier losses with larger and broader social and economic impact."

Any shortcomings in the government's response could inspire the citizenry to take matters into their own hands, eroding party control, said June Teufel Dreyer, a Chinese politics specialist at the University of Miami.

Shanghai fell short in areas such as distribution of food and medicine and provisions for the elderly and pets. In response, residents banded together in ad hoc groups to provide relief, a development that the party may have found disturbing,

"Will the party-government be able to reimpose control once the feeling of crisis abates? I don't think they'll find it too easy to do so," Dreyer said.

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HEADLINE	04/29 China lockdowns pandemic full circle
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/29/china-shanghai-covid-lockdown-pandemic-end/
GIST	<p>In a certain sense, it's early 2020 all over again. A major Chinese city is under draconian lockdown because of a coronavirus outbreak. The restrictions imposed by authorities have had grim downstream economic effects, snarling supply chains and manufacturing operations. The Chinese stock market is tanking.</p> <p>Instead of Wuhan, where the coronavirus first emerged more than two years ago, the current city in the spotlight is the coastal metropolis of Shanghai, now nearing its fifth week of an asphyxiating lockdown. The city is the latest showcase of China's relentless "zero covid" policy, which, in a bid to stomp out infections, sees sweeping restrictions imposed on the local population that would be hard to imagine in many societies elsewhere.</p>

The 26 million residents of China's financial capital have been ordered to stay confined at home, except when undergoing periodic rounds of mass testing. Anyone who tests positive is whisked away to quarantine centers, some with [living conditions](#) that include 24/7 lights and no privacy across tens of thousands of beds. In recent weeks, [more than 340 million people in China](#) have been placed under some form of lockdown.

Meanwhile, in much of the rest of the world, life appears largely normal — even when many Western countries report daily covid infections far higher than what's seen in China. Anthony S. Fauci, President Biden's chief medical adviser, [declared this week](#) that the United States is finally “out of the full-blown explosive pandemic phase” — which has led to almost 1 million deaths in the country. “We're really in a transitional phase, from a deceleration of the numbers into hopefully a more controlled phase and endemicity,” Fauci told The Washington Post.

The U.S.'s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that almost 60 percent of the country has already contracted covid. The European Union believes that figure for its population is somewhere between 60 percent and 80 percent. One by one, European countries have been [dropping covid-related restrictions](#) as they gear up for a summer of tourism and travel. No matter far greater death tolls than those reported by China, many societies in the West are coming to see that, thanks to vaccinations and growing herd immunity, it's possible to get on with life in covid's shadow.

In China, that does not seem possible. The absolutist dogma of “zero covid” pushed by the country's ruling authorities has led to [a game of whack-a-mole](#), with the government installing harsh quarantine regimes on whole communities even as the newer strains of coronavirus prove less lethal and dangerous, if more infectious. “China was the first to get into the pandemic, and it's the last to get out,” Joerg Wuttke, president of the E.U. Chamber of Commerce in China, [told a Swiss trade publication](#).

In Shanghai, the Chinese government is also seeing its powers of censorship and repression [tested to their limits](#). Mounting public anger over the manner and hardship of the lockdowns, food shortages and the dismal state of some quarantine centers has proliferated on Chinese social media, with the government censors playing catch up to delete such videos and messages.

The moment recalls the early stages of the outbreak in Wuhan, when authorities silenced a local doctor who tried to warn others of the risks of the virus in December before the threat was fully disclosed, and [then later succumbed to it himself](#).

“The censorship is more effective than two years ago, but this shows its limit,” Xiao Qiang, a researcher on Internet freedom at the University of California at Berkeley, [told the New York Times](#). “They can't solve the root of the problem. People see the government could be getting this wrong to the point of disaster.”

That's a real problem for Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is closely associated with the “zero covid” policy. For months in the depths of the pandemic, it [seemed a safe approach](#). As countries from North America to South Asia were ravaged by the virus, China stood apart. Wuhan, the pandemic's original epicenter, [staged an epic summer party](#) in the summer of 2020 at a time when transatlantic travel was brought to a virtual halt. The “people's war” against an “invisible enemy,” as Xi described his government's anti-covid efforts, was being won.

But things are different now as the omicron variant breaks through Chinese defenses. The lockdown in Shanghai is ham-handed, likely ineffectual and [deeply damaging in economic terms](#). Sticking to “zero covid” — including launching a possible new lockdown in Beijing, where cases are rising — would risk stoking more public disquiet, as well as [further economic disruption](#) at home and abroad.

Already, some analysts see an epochal collapse due to state policies. “We think the Chinese economy at this moment is in the worst shape in the past 30 years,” Weijian Shan, Hong Kong-based founder and chair of one of Asia's biggest private equity firms, told brokers in a meeting whose video was [obtained by the](#)

	<p>Financial Times. “The market sentiment toward Chinese stocks is also at the lowest point in the past 30 years. I also think popular discontent in China is at the highest point in the past 30 years.”</p> <p>Abandoning the current measures — similar to what governments in Australia and New Zealand ultimately decided to do once it became too difficult to contain infection breakouts — carries its own risks. For one thing, as James Palmer noted in Foreign Policy, a spike in new cases may spotlight “the relative weakness of Chinese-made vaccines and the low vaccination rate among the very elderly.”</p> <p>But, more importantly, ending “zero covid” would be an admission of failure by an autocrat who seems to need to look perennially infallible. “The ruling Chinese Communist Party would be effectively conceding that it really does not have a superior system with regard to Western liberal democracies,” wrote government professor Minxin Pei in Nikkei Asia Review. “President Xi, a consistent champion of the zero-COVID strategy, may also have to take responsibility for maintaining the current course despite mounting evidence of its unsustainability.”</p> <p>“For the past two years, the party leadership and government have spun the narrative that China has handled the pandemic much better than the decadent West,” Wuttke said. “Now this narrative is blowing up in their faces.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Europe wants US natural gas, price impact?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/04/28/europe-wants-american-natural-gas-that-could-drive-up-us-prices/
GIST	<p>Europe’s sudden need for an alternative to Russian energy is sparking a boom in the United States, the world’s second-largest exporter of natural gas that is liquefied and shipped overseas. But it may create fresh challenges for Jackie Johnson, whose side business raising Black Angus cattle recently turned into a financial sinkhole as gas prices went up.</p> <p>The fertilizer needed to grow hay on J2 Cattle Farm, his 150-acre operation in Trinity, N.C., costs three times what it did last year, largely because the methane in natural gas is a central ingredient. The chemicals that keep weeds from destroying Johnson’s hay? Also made from natural gas, and now exorbitantly expensive.</p> <p>“If this were my primary income, there is no way I could make it,” the 44-year-old electrical engineer said. “I can’t even break even.”</p> <p>As world leaders scramble to contain the fallout of the Kremlin’s decision to cut off gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria, a move that sent gas prices soaring in Europe, some large consumers of natural gas say a surge in U.S. exports will contribute to higher prices domestically. Already, Russia’s invasion has moved America to send abroad every molecule of natural gas that can be shipped, accounting for about 20 percent of the U.S. supply. The industry plans to nearly double exports in the future.</p> <p>A broad coalition including the GOP’s most fervent drilling enthusiasts, Biden White House energy advisers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce contends there will be plenty of gas to go around. A growth in shipments overseas, they say, would drive more gas production at home and help avoid the price shocks consumers are now confronting, with U.S. homeowners seeing their gas bills up more than 25 percent over last year.</p> <p>Yet some big fertilizer manufacturing operations, chemical plants and consumer groups are wary of such assurances.</p> <p>“You can’t just open the floodgates and keep exporting more gas without a safety net for the U.S. consumer,” said Paul Cicio, president of the Industrial Energy Consumers of America, a trade group representing thousands of manufacturers of fertilizers, chemicals and other products heavily reliant on natural gas. “But that is what is going on.”</p>

The gas industry's expansion plans would lock in contracts for American exports for decades, with most of the fuel eventually going to China and elsewhere in Asia. At a time when the United States is gripped by inflation, driven in no small part by energy shortages at home and abroad, the conflicting projections of how the long-range plans to sell more than a third of American gas to overseas customers would affect U.S. consumers are scrambling alliances in Washington and blurring ideological lines.

The heavy manufacturing businesses Cicio represents suddenly find themselves aligned with climate hawks who want to curb exports that threaten to prolong reliance on fossil fuels. Also on their side are left-leaning consumer groups like Public Citizen, which for years has lobbied against exports of natural gas, warning of the kind of price spikes low-income consumers are struggling with now.

"In terms of climate policy, we could not be further apart, but we are right next to them in how we look at what is happening with our nation's gas infrastructure," said Clark Williams-Derry, an analyst at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, a liberal think tank echoing Cicio's warnings about gas costs.

During the pandemic, demand for natural gas was flat from all the usual places: industry, power plants, and home and business furnaces and stoves, according to the figures from the Energy Information Agency. The notable exception was exports. As they rapidly expanded, prices kept going up.

"What we need to worry about now is keeping this from getting worse," Williams-Derry said. "We are deep in a hole. We need to stop pretending that approving new liquefied natural gas export terminals has no effect on us consumers."

Energy industry and Biden administration officials take issue with that framing. They say it ignores all manner of factors keeping natural gas prices inflated, including a substantial cutback in drilling in recent years and efforts to isolate Russia. A robust export market, [their argument goes](#), would lead to more natural gas infrastructure getting built, boosting supply not just for export but also for the domestic market.

"There is an ability to provide even more gas domestically," said Marty Durbin, who heads the Global Energy Institute at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "The resource here is so vast that if we have proper infrastructure, we would be able to produce even more."

Economists and gas industry experts have wildly varying views on who is right. Projecting the direction of fuel prices years out is a gamble. The biggest exporter of North American natural gas to Europe right now, Cheniere Energy, had initially bet that the United States would not be exporting much of the gas at all, but importing it. The Sabine Pass facility that it built in Louisiana to handle those imports nearly drove the company into bankruptcy when the United States was suddenly swimming in domestic natural gas during the shale boom. The facility has since been converted to be a hub of Cheniere's now-booming export business.

The argument that more exports would drive down costs is echoing through the halls of Congress, where Republicans are pressuring the Biden administration to ease environmental restrictions on pipeline construction and other infrastructure they say are constraining the nation's natural gas supply. Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, who is eager to see energy firms expand their exports from his state's Gulf Coast, has argued repeatedly that they would lower energy prices for Americans. More exports are a pillar of a plan he and 18 other GOP senators are promoting to [lower the price of fertilizer](#).

The Industrial Energy Consumers has a very different plan: [They want guardrails](#) that would curb exports at moments when American inventories of natural gas drop steeply. GOP lawmakers, predictably, oppose burdening the energy industry with such restrictions. But the Republican reasoning also resonates with some on the left.

Imposing the kind of guardrails demanded by the industrial energy consumers "would mean we couldn't be a reliable supplier," said Samantha Gross, a fellow specializing in climate and energy at the Brookings Institution, the liberal think tank. While many major environmental groups would rather phase out the use

of natural gas altogether, Gross argues that shipping the fuel abroad [helps provide energy security to allies](#) and could ultimately benefit the climate by giving China and India an affordable alternative to coal.

“It’s easy to say, ‘If we export more, prices will go up,’ ” Gross said. “All other things being equal, sure. But all other things won’t remain equal.”

Yet others on the left are frustrated to see the Biden administration so eagerly pivoting toward the industry’s position. A group of 10 senators from New England and the Midwest warned in a February letter to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm that the export enthusiasm hurts consumers struggling with soaring home heating bills.

“This is nothing but economics,” said one of the co-authors, Sen. Angus King (I-Maine), in floor debate last month. He laid out how the United States went from exporting no natural gas at all seven years ago to a fifth of its supply today.

“With the plants that have been approved, it is going to go up to 25, 30 or 35 percent,” King said. “That is going to impact prices here.”

Even within the gas industry, the message is not always consistent. Public utilities aligned with large multination energy companies investing big in exporting abroad, like Sempra subsidiary Southern California Gas, have raised no doubts about its impact on consumer prices at home. Yet as prices began to rise before war broke out in Europe, Chicago utility Peoples Gas made a presentation to the city highlighting increased exports of liquefied natural gas as one of the “longer term challenges for natural gas pricing.”

Back in the farming community, alliances are also unpredictable. One activist who fertilizer manufacturers and consumer advocates fighting the gas exports might have expected to join their coalition isn’t buying into the talking points.

Fourth-generation cattle and grain farmer Darvin Bentlage of Barton County, Mo., has long warned that multinational corporations are destroying local agriculture, including in [a piece](#) he co-authored for the Nation magazine last year.

But he is skeptical of fertilizer company claims that a reason independent farmers like he and Jackie Johnson may struggle to afford the product into the future is because natural gas executives are chasing profits abroad.

Bentlage blames the fertilizer industry’s own sprint to boost its bottom line amid industry consolidation that has made the product less competitive.

“Their profit margins are jumping,” Bentlage said. “It’s always a good excuse to blame it on someone else. ... It’s smoke and mirrors.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 Russia strikes Kyiv during UN visit
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/28/russia-kyiv-cruise-missile-strike-biden-guterres
GIST	<p>Russia hit Kyiv with cruise missile strikes in a menacing display of defiance while the UN secretary general was visiting the city and a few hours after Joe Biden had announced a doubling of US military and economic aid to Ukraine.</p> <p>Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the strikes happened “immediately after” his talks with the UN chief, António Guterres, “and this says a lot about Russia’s true attitude to global institutions, about the efforts of the Russian leadership to humiliate the UN and everything that the organisation represents.</p> <p>“Therefore, it requires a strong response,” Zelenskiy added.</p>

Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba called the strikes a “heinous act of barbarism” that demonstrated Russia’s attitude towards Ukraine, Europe and the world.

At least 10 people were injured when one of the two missiles launched struck the lower floors of a 25-storey residential building in the Shevchenkivskyi district of the capital, Ukrainian state emergency officials said. Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said three people were in hospital.

“We are still in shock. We were in the house when they bombed the building,” Maksym Maksymov, 29, a sales manager, told the Guardian. “We heard the first strike. And then a second missile hit the building.”

Guterres said he was shocked by the missile strikes, “not because I’m here but because Kyiv is a sacred city for Ukrainians and Russians alike”.

In his nightly address, Zelenskiy said the missile strikes on Kyiv and other cities “prove that we cannot let our guard down”.

He thanked the US for the proposed new funding saying that prompt weapons supplies were “salvation not only for our people – this is salvation for all of you - for all of Europe”.

Thursday’s missile strikes came hours after Biden asked Congress to give immediate approval for spending that would include [over \\$33bn in military aid](#), involving everything from heavy artillery and armoured vehicles to greater intelligence sharing, cyberwarfare tools and many more anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles.

Biden also requested \$8.5bn in economic aid to Kyiv and \$3bn in humanitarian relief, as well as funds to help increase US production of food crops and strategic minerals to offset the impact of the war in Ukraine on global supplies.

The total of \$33bn is more than twice the last supplemental request approved by Congress in March and dwarfs the entire defense budget of Ukraine and of many other countries. The US president said it was aimed at helping Ukraine repel the renewed Russian offensives in the east and south of the country, but also to transition to assuring the nation’s longer-term security needs.

On the same day, Congress agreed to update the 1941 lend-lease legislation with which Franklin D Roosevelt sought to help Britain and other allies fight Nazi Germany. The updated law is intended to make it easier for the US to provide military equipment to Ukraine.

It comes in the face of Russian warnings that increased western weapons supplies to Ukraine would endanger European security, that western intervention could bring instant Russian reprisals and raise the risk of nuclear conflict.

Making the case for western aid, Biden argued that on the contrary, if Putin was not stopped in Ukraine he would continue to threaten global peace and stability.

The president framed the request principally in terms of defending Ukraine, and did not explicitly repeat the declaration earlier this week by his defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, [that one of US aims in Ukraine was to weaken Russia to stop it attacking other countries](#).

“Despite the disturbing rhetoric coming out of the Kremlin, the facts are plain for everybody to see. We’re not attacking Russia. We’re helping Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression,” Biden said. But he added the cost involved was “a small price to pay to punish Russia and aggression, to lessen the risk of future conflicts”.

“Throughout our history, we’ve learned that when dictators do not pay the price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and engage in more aggression,” he said. “The threats to America and the world keep rising. We can’t let this happen.”

The new military assistance the congressional funding will finance will include:

- More artillery and armored vehicles, as well as anti-tank missiles and anti-aircraft systems.
- Help to build up Ukraine’s cyberwarfare capabilities.
- More intelligence sharing.
- Support to increase Ukraine’s ability to produce munitions and strategic minerals.
- Assistance in clearing landmines and other explosives and in Ukraine’s defence against chemical, biological and dirty bomb attacks.
- A further buildup in the US military presence on Nato’s eastern flank.

The Kremlin’s official spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, warned on Thursday that an increased western supply of heavy weapons to Kyiv would endanger European security.

“The tendency to pump weapons, including heavy weapons, into Ukraine, these are the actions that threaten the security of the continent, provoke instability,” Peskov said.

The day before, Vladimir Putin had threatened a “lightning fast” response to western intervention in Ukraine, adding: “We have all the weapons we need for this.”

His foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has [accused the US and its allies of fighting a proxy war in Ukraine](#) and warned of the rising danger of a nuclear conflict.

Biden rejected the accusation he was fighting a proxy war, describing the claim as part of the Kremlin’s domestic propaganda to explain the inability of Russian forces to achieve their goals.

“I think it’s more of a reflection, not of the truth, but of their failure,” the president said. He added: “No one should be making idle comments about the use of nuclear weapons.”

The package of proposals the administration is sending to Congress also includes measures to strengthen the hand of the justice department in pursuing Kremlin-aligned oligarchs seizing their assets and using the proceeds to support the war effort in Ukraine.

Biden made his announcement as the UN secretary general was visiting Ukraine, [where he described the war as “an absurdity” in the 21st century](#).

Guterres was touring Borodianka on Thursday, where Russian forces are [accused of massacring civilians](#) before their withdrawal, on his first visit to Ukraine since the start of the invasion on 24 February, before talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

In [nearby Bucha](#), where dozens of civilian bodies, some with their hands tied, were discovered this month, Guterres backed an investigation by the international criminal court into possible war crimes in Ukraine. “I appeal to the Russian Federation to accept, to cooperate with the ICC,” he said.

Ukraine’s prosecutor general [Iryna Venediktova](#) named 10 Russian soldiers allegedly involved in human rights abuses during the [month-long occupation of Bucha](#).

[Venediktova](#) also told German TV that that Ukrainian investigators had identified “more than 8,000 cases” of suspected war crimes since Russia’s invasion.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-making-slow-progress-in-bid-to-cut-off-ukrainian-forces-11651143367?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>President Biden sent Congress a \$33 billion request to fund more weapons and provide longer-term economic assistance for Kyiv, as Russia's military is gradually seizing more territory in Ukraine's east, pushing south from the city of Izyum with the apparent aim of cutting off Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>Mr. Biden said Thursday that the \$13.6 billion in funding that Congress had initially provided to Ukraine to help cover the first two months of the war was nearly depleted and that far more was needed, describing the conflict as being at a pivotal point.</p> <p>The push for more Ukraine aid has garnered broad bipartisan support in Congress and signals how the U.S. and its European allies are preparing for a longer war that could grind on for months.</p> <p>Thursday's proposal, as described by administration officials, includes \$20.4 billion in military and security aid. It comes a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed a swift response to any greater Western involvement in the conflict.</p> <p>Russian forces have seized villages south of Izyum in recent days and are gathering for a fresh thrust after Ukraine halted their progress, Ukraine's military said Thursday. Ukrainian and Western officials and analysts say Moscow's progress is slow and has yet to achieve a decisive breakthrough.</p> <p>In Kyiv, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday after meeting with Mr. Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow earlier this week. He said the U.N. would continue to push for a full-scale cease-fire while expanding cash assistance and "striving for immediate practical steps to save lives and reduce human suffering."</p> <p>While he was in the Ukrainian capital on Thursday night, Mr. Guterres said that two missiles hit the city.</p> <p>"Two rockets have exploded in Kyiv. I was shocked to be informed that two rockets exploded in the city where I am," he said in an interview with the BBC.</p> <p>Kyiv has seen relatively little action since Russia at the end of March switched its immediate objectives from taking Kyiv and ousting the elected government to seizing chunks of territory in Ukraine's east. But any success in severing Ukrainian units' supply lines might not be decisive, analysts say, because Russian forces would be vulnerable to Ukrainian counterattacks and face tough urban fighting.</p> <p>Moscow is seeking a quick advance before Ukraine is able to transfer new and rejuvenated units to the east, bolstered by heavy weapons promised or already delivered by the West, analysts say. Ukrainian officials say Russia is suffering heavy losses.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky said in a late-night address that he was grateful to the American people and to Mr. Biden for the request for more aid for his country and that he hoped Congress would act quickly.</p> <p>"The negative consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and against democracy are so large-scale for the whole world that, in comparison with them, this support from the United States is necessary," Mr. Zelensky said.</p> <p>Lawmakers in Washington have said that they have been prepared to approve another package of military, humanitarian and economic aid for Ukraine quickly, but that they have disagreed over whether to tackle Mr. Biden's request on its own, as Republicans want, or combine the Ukraine request with other spending packages, as Democrats prefer.</p> <p>The House on Thursday approved legislation to create a lend-lease agreement designed to speed up the transfer of military equipment to Ukraine, similar to what the U.S. did with Britain during World War II. The Senate passed the bill earlier this month.</p>

The Pentagon said Wednesday that more than half of the 90 howitzers it recently pledged to Ukraine had been delivered. Oleksiy Arestovych, a Ukrainian presidential adviser, said that by the end of May, arms would have arrived in sufficient quantities to change the balance of forces on the front.

“By the middle of June...we will be ready to go on the attack,” he said in a Ukrainian television interview late Wednesday.

The West is funneling arms, such as artillery and anti-aircraft guns, and ammunition to Ukraine to help it defend itself in [a new phase of the war](#), in which heavy weapons are expected to play a more important role. The weapons will take time to have an effect on the battlefield. Some of the systems are new to Ukrainians and require training and integrating into Kyiv’s military. The Pentagon said it had completed howitzer training this week for 50 Ukrainians who can pass on the knowledge to teammates.

Russia has quickly thrown together the remnants of units that were decimated in [fighting around Kyiv](#) in the first weeks of the war and sent them into fighting in the east. That has left Russian forces there without sufficient logistical and other support, preventing a significant breakthrough, the U.K. Ministry of Defense said Wednesday, describing Russian advances as minor.

“They have not taken enough time to rebuild forces wrecked in fighting around Kyiv,” said Frederick Kagan, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank in Washington. “They are hurling them into combat as they become available.”

Russian officials say they intend to push Ukrainian forces out of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, which the Kremlin recognized as independent in February. Moscow says the invasion, which it calls a special military operation, is going according to plan.

Mr. Arestovych, the Ukrainian presidential adviser, said that Russia could achieve further advances where it has concentrated artillery and aerial power for bombardments, but that Ukrainian forces were inflicting heavy losses and withdrawing only to take up better defensive positions.

Russia’s military has so far had little success breaching the defensive line that Ukraine’s army set up along the front line of [an eight-year conflict](#) with Russian proxies in eastern Ukraine. But Russia has made progress striking from Russian territory in the north, where Ukrainian defenses were less prepared.

The Russian advances south of Izyum appear aimed at cutting off Ukrainian troops in the cities of Slovyansk and Kramatorsk. Another Russian advance farther east, toward the city of Lyman, is attempting to encircle the cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. Analysts said it was as yet unclear whether Russia would seek a large encirclement of Ukrainian troops or smaller pockets.

But even if they surround Ukrainian units, Russian forces will be vulnerable to counterattacks and would have to pursue urban fighting, in which defenders have a significant advantage. Russia’s military surrounded large cities [such as Chernihiv](#) in northern Ukraine in March but failed to capture them.

“At a certain point it is possible, but not inevitable, that the Russian will to fight will break, that they will not be able to conduct offensive operations if they continue to take terrible losses,” said Mr. Kagan.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said Thursday that its forces shot down a Ukrainian Su-24 aircraft near Mykolaivka in eastern Ukraine. It said that Russia’s air force struck 67 Ukrainian military facilities over the previous 24 hours and that Russian forces had repelled an attack by Ukrainian forces with Tochka-U missiles and rocket launchers in Russian-held territory in Kherson, in Ukraine’s south.

Mr. Zelensky, meanwhile, accused Russia of using what he called energy blackmail to warn European countries off providing further support for Ukraine. [Moscow cut off gas supplies](#) to Poland and Bulgaria on Wednesday, a move that the Ukrainian leader called a clear demonstration that “no one in Europe can hope to maintain any normal economic cooperation with Russia.”

Some European officials have said that Russia's moves against Poland and Bulgaria were intended as a warning against all European Union members sending weapons and ammunition to Ukraine. Germany's Parliament on Thursday approved plans to deliver [antiaircraft cannon tanks to Ukraine](#), ditching its previous reluctance to send heavy weapons.

The EU has vowed to continue phasing out purchases of Russian natural gas, with Germany also now ready to [stop buying Russian oil](#), clearing the way for an EU-wide ban on crude imports from Russia.

Mr. Guterres also visited Bucha, a commuter town just north of Kyiv where [hundreds of residents were killed](#) during Russia's initial attempt to seize the Ukrainian capital in the early days of the invasion and a subsequent occupation. The area is now the focus of a war-crimes investigation by the International Criminal Court, though Russia isn't a party to the court and is unlikely to extradite any commanders to stand trial.

"I appeal to the Russian Federation to accept to cooperate with the International Criminal Court," Mr. Guterres said. "But when we talk about war crimes, we cannot forget that the worst of crimes is war itself."

Ukrainian authorities on Thursday [filed criminal charges](#) against 10 Russian soldiers accused of taking civilians hostage and mistreating them in Bucha, in the first such move by prosecutors investigating possible war crimes.

All were noncommissioned officers and privates from Russia's 64th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, one of the units that took part in the monthlong occupation of the Kyiv suburb. Ukrainian authorities said they discovered more than 400 dead civilians after Russian forces retreated in late March, their bodies packed in mass graves or left splayed on streets and sidewalks.

Russia has previously rejected allegations of war crimes, including accusations of targeting civilians.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Farmers discover fields full of mines
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-russian-retreat-ukraines-farmers-discover-fields-full-of-mines-11651150800
GIST	<p>Russian forces have riddled Ukrainian fields with mines and destroyed equipment in areas they once occupied, in what returning farmers and the Kyiv government allege is a campaign by Moscow to hobble the country's agricultural industry.</p> <p>Russia's invasion already has decimated shipments of corn, wheat and sunflower oil from what was until recently one of the world's biggest food exporters. Prices have soared, adding to global food-price inflation and heaping misery on developing countries that had been dependent on imports from the region.</p> <p>The extent of damage to some farms, together with port disruption and a shortage of fertilizer, demonstrates how the war's impact on Ukraine's agriculture industry could extend well into next year.</p> <p>When Russian troops pulled out of areas around Kyiv, they left shattered buildings and were accused of war crimes against the local population. Farmers in northern Ukraine say they have returned to fields littered with mines, unexploded ordnance and large craters. Several workers have been killed, and the work has been placed on hold in some areas, the farmers add.</p> <p>Alex Lissitsa, chief executive of IMC, one of Ukraine's largest agricultural companies, said his workers should now be planting sunflowers and corn on 30,000 hectares of land (a hectare is 2.47 acres) north of Chernihiv but can't because of unexploded shells and mines.</p>

“It looks like this year or even the year after we will not be able to do anything here,” Mr. Lissitsa said of parts of the land. The company also lost a grain storage facility, a chemicals laboratory and other buildings and equipment to Russian shelling.

Mr. Lissitsa said he frequently hears of deaths related to mines, adding that a worker on a neighboring farm was recently killed when his tractor ran over one.

The Ukrainian government estimates that mines are present in around 30% of farm fields in areas around Kyiv previously occupied by the Russians.

Taras Vysotskyi, Ukraine’s deputy minister of agrarian policy and food, said it was clear that the targeting of agriculture was deliberate because Russian forces placed mines in fields of no military value and continued to do so even as they withdrew. “It was the case of blocking the possibility of making agriculture productive again in Ukraine,” he said.

The two regions where the retreating Russians set mines and destroyed farm equipment and buildings are among the most agriculturally productive in Ukraine, Mr. Vysotskyi added.

Russian officials didn’t respond to a request for comment about targeting Ukraine’s agriculture industry. Moscow has previously denied targeting civilians.

Despite having been sent photos of damage to his farm near the northern city of Chernihiv, Petro Melnyk said he wasn’t prepared for the extent of the destruction when he returned over two weeks ago.

“The Russians specifically want to stop farms,” said Mr. Melnyk, the CEO and co-owner of Agricom Group, which owns farms across Ukraine. Mr. Melnyk said his properties had been heavily bombed, destroying buildings, tractors and other machinery, although no known Ukrainian military positions are nearby.

To be sure, not all farmers think they were deliberately targeted. Dmitry Skorniakov has found Russian mines on parts of his 8,000 hectares in the Sumy and Chernihiv regions but he believes that they were intended for the Ukrainian military rather than to hurt agriculture, partly because mines were at the edges of fields.

Either way, the damage to farming capacity and the continued occupation of farmland in Ukraine’s east and south is a blow to an industry that provides 10% of global wheat exports, 14% of corn exports and about half of the world’s sunflower oil, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The World Bank recently warned of a global food catastrophe stemming from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Farmers are waiting for the Ukrainian military to clear the mines and munitions, which could take a while. Evgeniy Kharlan, who farms asparagus and blueberries, asked the military to clear unexploded munitions on his land close to the front line in eastern Ukraine and was told that clearing cities and towns was a higher priority. Mr. Kharlan also said the military told him to avoid his other farm near Chernobyl because of the risk posed by mines.

The delay in getting back to work likely will reduce the harvest this year and potentially next, Mr. Kharlan said, adding that only around 30% to 40% of his fields were now being farmed.

The Ukrainian government predicts 25% less land will be planted this spring than usual, though several farming companies operating in the country say the projection is too optimistic.

Mr. Melnyk said he was confident that he can borrow or rent enough equipment to farm around 80% of his 9,000 hectares in the Chernihiv region, and that he already was farming a further 9,000 hectares elsewhere. However, he also has 6,000 hectares in the Luganz province in eastern Ukraine that Russian forces still control that he has written off farming this year.

	<p>Even where farmers are working, a lack of fertilizer and chemicals used for crop protection mean that yields will likely be lower.</p> <p>Mr. Lissitsa's corn fields would typically yield around 10 metric tons per hectare (a metric ton is 1.1 tons). "Now, I would be happy with 8 tons a hectare, but it will definitely be less," he said.</p> <p>Some Western companies, including Germany's Bayer AG, have donated seeds to Ukraine. Others, including Exxon Mobil Corp., have helped with fuel supplies, a government official said. Farmers say they have been able to buy more fuel in recent weeks after an acute shortage hampered their ability to plant and to spread fertilizer last month.</p> <p>But Ukraine remains particularly low on fertilizers, which before the war it had bought from Russia and Belarus. Ukraine is also struggling to export its produce because Russia has blockaded its Black Sea ports or taken control of them. And farmers in some parts of the country have had to contend with heavy rain in recent weeks.</p> <p>In the face of the challenges, farmers are racing against the clock. "We should be finished [spring] planting by the latest 20th May," Mr. Lissitsa said last week. "We have only 25 days to plant."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 Train delays bog down farm sector
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/train-delays-bog-down-u-s-farm-sector-11651224781?mod=hp_lead_pos4
GIST	<p>Congestion on America's railroads is creating anxiety for farmers and agriculture companies, industry officials said, disrupting operations and potentially pushing up food prices.</p> <p>Delayed trains and scarce railcars are impeding crop shipments this spring, causing grain storage facilities to fill up, backing up fertilizer shipments and temporarily shutting down production at ethanol producing plants, company executives said. Railroad operators said they are working to fix the problems, but struggling to find enough workers.</p> <p>The railroad slowdown has grain companies looking for other ways to move farm commodities across the country, leading to higher transportation costs that company officials said will ultimately increase food prices for consumers. Food globally is already becoming more expensive, with food makers paying more for fuel, ingredients and labor.</p> <p>"We are seeing a disruption across the industry from top to bottom," said Todd Becker, chief executive of Green Plains Inc., a major producer of ethanol and animal feed ingredients. "Transportation is a big driver of food prices."</p> <p>Green Plains, based in Omaha, Neb., first started seeing rail disruptions at the end of last year, Mr. Becker said, but the problems intensified between January and April. In the first quarter of this year, several of the company's plants west of the Mississippi River had to stop producing ethanol for several days at a time because of the rail problems, he said. Green Plains has leaned on trucks as a more expensive, but sometimes more reliable, way to transport its ethanol.</p> <p>The railroad companies attribute the service problems to worker shortages and high demand. The companies have said they are making headway on staffing issues as they ramp up hiring. Union Pacific said last week during its latest quarterly earnings report that operationally it didn't meet expectations and is working to increase crews and locomotives where needed.</p> <p>"Clearly, the entire rail industry is in a place where we're, as a collective, not providing the kind of service that our customers demand," Union Pacific CEO Lance Fritz said on a call with analysts. "This is all about getting our labor right, getting utilization right, making sure the other resources are ready and then executing."</p>

Weekly grain train speeds are down 6% from the same period a year ago for major freight railroads, according to an April 21 report from the Department of Agriculture. Dwell times, which measure how long a car remains at a terminal, are up 22%, and the number of grain cars not moved in over 48 hours is up by nearly one-third, the report said.

The delays make shipping more expensive. For the week ending April 14, bids for railcar delivery in April reached \$3,750, over \$3,000 above average, according to the USDA report.

Rail shipments from Iowa to the Southwest that used to take about 8 days for a round trip are now running about 20, said Eric Wilkey, president of Arizona Grain Inc., a grain company in Casa Grande, Ariz. The backlog has delayed shipments of livestock feed to Mr. Wilkey's customers in Arizona, and he is having to pay more to ship grain by truck or pay steep premiums to secure additional railcars, he said.

"If I have to pay a premium to get railcars, I'll have to lower my bid to farmers to cover extra freight costs," Mr. Wilkey said, referring to the prices Arizona Grain offers to farmers for their crops. If the congestion continues through the next month, Mr. Wilkey said he isn't going to be able to buy as much grain from farmers.

Railroad congestion and labor constraints have led to issues for Land O'Lakes Inc., a major farm cooperative, receiving bulk ingredients for its Purina animal feed business and delayed shipments of butter from California, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The National Grain and Feed Association, a trade group representing grain companies including Archer Daniels Midland Co., Bunge Ltd. and Cargill Inc., has raised concerns about the congestion problems in the U.S. with the Surface Transportation Board, which regulates freight railroad operations.

"It adds another layer of logistical and supply-chain uncertainty into the market at what is already a historically volatile time," said Michael Seyfert, president and CEO of the NGFA. "Grain cars are significantly behind schedule, processing plants are shutting down, feed mills can't get feed some days, export vessels are being delayed."

Agriculture trade groups and companies, including Cargill, testified at an STB hearing on Tuesday about rail service problems involving the major railways such as BNSF Railway Co., Norfolk Southern Railway Co. and Union Pacific Railroad Co.

The disruptions have increased average transit times for Cargill's private rail fleet by 15%, said Brock Lautenschlager, Cargill's North America rail leader, in his Tuesday testimony. Plants have had to slow production and temporarily shut down because there were no railcars available to deliver or ship product, said Mr. Lautenschlager.

"Since the fourth quarter of 2021, rail service has deteriorated to such a degree that our industry is struggling to play its essential role in the food and agriculture system," he said.

Fertilizer maker CF Industries said earlier this month that some of its spring deliveries to farmers could be delayed because of shipping reductions by Union Pacific, potentially jeopardizing farmers' harvests and increasing the cost of food for consumers. The company also said it may not be able to accept new sales transported over rail lines involving the Omaha-based railroad for the foreseeable future.

"They really got caught with a heavy demand load, and are light on staff and now are playing whack-a-mole," Bert Frost, CF's head of sales and supply chain, said about the rail lines cutting shipments from certain companies. A Union Pacific spokeswoman said the railroad is working with customers to mitigate disruptions.

Although more expensive and time-consuming, the company is trying to get its product to U.S. farmers by using river barges, trucks and vessels along the coasts, Mr. Frost said. With the global fertilizer supply

	<p>already tight because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and farmers facing record-high prices, Mr. Frost said CF can't afford to cut back production.</p> <p>"There is a need for nutrients," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 More shocks likely to 'challenge economy'
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-economy-janet-yellen-356153601cd404a0967c26e7a50875ac
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Thursday the global pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine highlight the possibility of big economic shocks in the future, adding that downturns are "likely to continue to challenge the economy."</p> <p>Her address at the Brookings Institution looked at lessons learned from economic downturns of the past and said countries need to build in "recession remedies" to protect people in the U.S. and globally going forward.</p> <p>With "large negative shocks" inevitable, she said, policymakers have learned from the Great Recession that it's imperative to exit economic downturns "as quickly as possible."</p> <p>"Countries will fare better if their economies are more resilient and less fragile," she said. "Improved understanding of breaks in supply chains, increases in commodity prices, bursting of asset bubbles, and labor and productivity shocks can help policymakers implement reforms that bolster our economic resilience."</p> <p>The past several years have been marked by a worldwide pandemic that prompted both the Trump and Biden administrations to issue trillions of dollars in federal stimulus aid, which economists say contributed to inflation levels at their highest points in four decades. And now the war in Ukraine has had major impacts on global energy and food prices, along with other commodities.</p> <p>The Conference Board's consumer confidence index edged down slightly in April.</p> <p>Yellen called for more permanent housing safety assistance for renters and homeowners and applauded recent improvements to the unemployment insurance system and stimulus payments, stressing the importance of U.S. "recovery policies that shorten the duration of recessions and mitigate economic pain."</p> <p>She promoted Biden administration efforts to reduce U.S. reliance on fossil fuels and push for greater energy independence.</p> <p>"These shifts will mitigate our future vulnerability to oil price shocks," she said. "At the same time, they will abet the transition to cleaner energy sources which will, in due course, lessen the risks tied to natural disasters and climate change."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 US turns back Ukraine refugees at border
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukrainian-refugees-turned-back-at-border-in-mexico-as-u-s-changes-policy-11651162701?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY—About 200 Ukrainians were turned back at the U.S. border in Mexico this week, after U.S. authorities closed a border checkpoint near San Diego that has processed thousands of refugees since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, authorities and volunteers say.</p> <p>The group of Ukrainians, who are at a shelter in the Mexican border city of Tijuana, now face a longer waiting period while they file their petitions to be admitted into the U.S. under a new refugee-sponsorship</p>

program. More than 100 people arriving in Mexico on trans-Atlantic flights have separately been sent to a shelter in Mexico City, where new asylum requests will be processed.

Ukrainian asylum seekers say the policy changes that went into effect this week took them by surprise. Many were en route to Mexico and planning to take connecting flights to Tijuana, hoping to cross quickly into the U.S.

Last week, [the Biden administration said](#) that it would cease processing Ukrainian refugees at U.S. border crossings and that they shouldn't travel to Mexico to pursue entry into the U.S.

"They can't just cancel their flights and they can't go back to Europe," said Anastasiya Polo, a young volunteer from California who helps coordinate operations at the Mexico City shelter, set up in a corner of a large sports complex in eastern Mexico City.

Ukrainian migrants don't need visas to enter Mexico, and they have used the land border as the easiest way to enter the U.S. Since March 11, more than 20,000 Ukrainian refugees were quickly processed through border checkpoints, primarily at a point-of-entry near San Diego, according to U.S. government estimates. Most Ukrainians were given permission to live and work in the U.S. for two years on humanitarian grounds.

A lawyer from the southwestern Ukrainian city of Chernivtsi who identified himself only as Grigore said that soon after landing in Mexico City on Tuesday a group of volunteers at the airport told him and his mother that they should stay in town if they wanted to get into the U.S.

"We were expecting to go to Tijuana, but we were told that the shelter there will soon close down," he said as he looked for a public Wi-Fi connection inside the large sports complex. He plans to settle in Mississippi, where his uncle is acting as financial sponsor for him and his mother.

The online application process to be admitted to the U.S. could take about seven days, migrants and volunteers say. It requires vaccination certificates, biometric screening and a U.S.-based sponsor who can provide financial support.

The Biden administration has said that the new program, called Uniting for Ukraine, aims to provide a streamlined process for Ukrainian refugees who can apply directly from Europe. Aid groups estimate that more than five million Ukrainians—mainly women and children—have fled to neighboring countries.

In Tijuana, local authorities and volunteers were helping some 180 Ukrainians who were affected by the change in policy. One option being discussed was to help the asylum seekers buy airline tickets to fly back to Mexico City before the Tijuana shelter is closed in the coming days, said Enrique Lucero, head of the migrant support unit of the Tijuana city government.

"Right now in Tijuana, citizens of Ukraine are in the same situation as any other migrant from Central America. They can't request asylum at the border because of Title 42," he said, referring to the public-health policy that allows the government to turn away asylum seekers at border checkpoints.

The shelter in Tijuana, which sits just a few yards from the U.S.-Mexico border fence, was well equipped and stocked with stands offering hot meals, coffee, toiletries and legal support. The one set up early this week in the country's capital by local and federal authorities is austere, filled with large white tents and equipped with portable sinks and toilets.

The Mexico City shelter could be open for more than a month, said Mexican Deputy Interior Minister Alejandro Encinas.

"We want to ensure that Ukrainian migrants have the right conditions to reach their destination," Mr. Encinas said as he inspected the facilities on Wednesday.

Return to Top	<p>A few things need improvement since the shelter opened just a few days ago. Travelers lack access to a stable Wi-Fi connection, which affects their ability to file humanitarian applications online. They also need more blankets, said Ms. Polo, the volunteer from California.</p> <p>“We are relaxed and comfortable, considering all the stressful situations that we’ve been through,” said Daniel Bodnar, a 26-year-old Ukrainian who lived in the Russian port city of Rostov-on-Don, where he sold skateboard and snowboard equipment.</p> <p>He fled with his Russian wife and decided to seek asylum in the U.S. after Russian security officers came to their house following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and interrogated him about their political positions, asking why Mr. Bodnar hadn’t applied for Russian citizenship. A friend in Chicago is acting as sponsor for the couple.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Mr. Bodnar joined in a soccer game with local immigration officers and Ukrainian children. “To us, this shelter looks like a summer camp,” said Jane, Mr. Bodnar’s wife.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 Ukraine forces crash course on Javelins
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukrainian-forces-get-crash-course-on-javelin-missiles-from-u-s-volunteers-11651224602?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine—An American trainer known to his Ukrainian students simply as Texas carefully drew on a school blackboard the outline of a Russian T-72 tank and a plan of the surrounding area, and explained how he had ambushed it with a Javelin missile earlier this month.</p> <p>Then he picked up the missile and its charcoal-grey command launch unit, or CLU, showing to a few dozen Ukrainian soldiers the correct firing positions. Another U.S. trainer, Mark Hayward, a 53-year-old retired U.S. Special Forces operator from Alaska, stepped in with advice on how to operate the antitank weapon in varying weather and light conditions.</p> <p>“I know you are all infantrymen, but with this, you need to behave like snipers. Play spy games,” said Texas, a Ukrainian-born American whose real first name is Anton and who didn’t want to disclose his surname because his relatives still reside in Ukraine. “Everything is in your hands; 90% of the success depends on you, the operators, and only 10% on the missile.”</p> <p>Weapons supplied by the U.S. and other Western allies, particularly the Javelin missiles that have a range of up to 3 kilometers—longer than the ranges of guns on most Russian tanks—have played a critical role in enabling outgunned Ukrainian forces to repel the massive onslaught of Russian armor since the war began on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Even more sophisticated weapons systems, such as 155 mm howitzers with precision-guided munitions, are beginning to flow to Ukraine as Washington and partners start to provide Ukrainian troops with NATO-standard heavy weapons that could blunt Russia’s advantage in armor, artillery and aircraft.</p> <p>The bottleneck for this influx of aid is training. Ukrainian soldiers must be taught quickly to operate sophisticated and unfamiliar systems—in the middle of a war, and as Russian cruise missiles strike warehouses, railway hubs and bases deep in the Ukrainian rear.</p> <p>In Western militaries, soldiers who operate these weapons undergo weeks or months of training before firing their first live shot. The U.S. and other nations in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization pulled their military trainers from Ukraine shortly before Russia invaded.</p> <p>This means that American and other Western volunteers, such as Mr. Hayward and Anton, are filling the skills gap, lecturing at Ukrainian military units near the front lines—and sometimes taking part in the fight themselves. “We wound up being Javelin trainers by default,” Mr. Hayward said. That involved, among</p>

other things, watching YouTube training videos and poring over complex manuals once he arrived in Ukraine, to bring himself up-to-date.

The basic U.S. Army Javelin training program comprises 80 hours, according to the field manual.

“Here, we are trying to teach soldiers to be able to use Javelins in two days, so they can go out and carry out their combat tasks,” said Lt. Col. Serhiy, the head of training for Ukraine’s 128th Separate Mountain Assault Transcarpathian Brigade, which operates on the front southeast of Zaporizhzhia and in Donbas. Like other Ukrainian military personnel, he isn’t allowed to disclose his surname.

“Training during the war means less theory and more practice,” Lt. Col. Serhiy said.

It takes only a few hours to master the shorter-range missiles, such the British-made NLAW and German-made Panzerfaust, that are better suited for the kind of urban combat that took place in the suburbs of the capital Kyiv in March. The far more complicated Javelins are indispensable for the battles under way now in the wide-open areas where the 128th Brigade is deployed, such as the rural countryside here in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, because they allow troops to strike from afar before becoming targets themselves. The U.S. has supplied some 5,500 Javelin missiles to Ukrainian forces, according to the Pentagon.

“Javelins are perfect for effective fire here in the open fields,” said Capt. Ivan, a company commander with the 128th Brigade whose unit in recent days seized a village in the Zaporizhzhia region. On Thursday, plumes of dark smoke from Russian shelling rose at a nearby tree line as loud thuds shook the village’s buildings. A burned-out Russian armored personnel carrier was on the roadside nearby.

Russian and Ukrainian positions in the village were about 2 kilometers apart, and troops attempting to advance with shorter-range missiles such as NLAW exposed themselves to Russian fire well before being able to strike, he said.

A private first class in Capt. Ivan’s company, Oleksandr, said he started his Javelin training at a base in western Ukraine two days before the war began, with a proper simulator. His first shot on a simulator failed, he said, but the machine made him understand how to operate the system in real life. “If you haven’t used a simulator, it will be very hard to figure out the right sequence, the way the joystick works, the right way to prepare,” Oleksandr said.

He has since destroyed nine Russian armored vehicles, including at least three tanks. “Without the Javelins, it would have been very hard to stop the enemy pushing ahead,” Oleksandr said. “They now know that we have the weapons that can hit them very effectively, and of course it demoralizes the enemy and keeps them in check.”

Mr. Hayward, a resident of Nome, Alaska, came up with another solution to make training easier. The Javelin’s launcher, or CLU, has a total battery life of roughly four hours, which means that it drains quickly even when it’s switched on for training. Units that he has worked with in Ukraine were unable to procure spare batteries.

So Mr. Hayward, Anton and Ukrainian engineers assembled their own alternative power source using motorcycle batteries, cables from a DIY store and a 3D-printed frame for classroom training.

Mr. Hayward says he decided to come to Ukraine immediately after hearing news of the Russian invasion, inspired by President Volodymyr Zelensky’s statement early in the war that he needed weapons and not a ride out. A medical trainer who works in indigenous communities across the Bering Strait from Russia, Mr. Hayward said he had an additional reason to join the fight.

“I can guarantee you that the Russia that’s willing to invade Ukraine and bomb its cities just because the government won’t surrender to it is the same Russia that would be willing to cut off fuel barges to Nome and let me and my family freeze,” he said.

In the first days of the war, he flew to Poland. There, a friendly taxi driver arranged for him to buy a used ambulance for €4,000, or about \$4,200, which he painted green and now uses to move around Ukraine, with a motorcycle and a large flag of Alaska inside.

Anton, 35, a Houston-based manager for a large industrial-services company, was moved into action after watching on TV scenes of his birthplace in northern Ukraine being shelled by Russian troops in February. He left his wife and three small children behind.

“This is not a war of good versus evil but of normal versus evil,” he said. “Normal people were living normal lives, and then Russia decided to wage war on them.”

The two Americans—who are Mormon—met at a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints temple in Lviv, Ukraine, and ended up connecting informally with a Ukrainian Marines brigade operating out of the southern city of Mykolaiv.

The Mykolaiv Marines welcomed Anton, Mr. Hayward and a handful of American and British veterans with Javelin experience. Anton, unlike other foreigners, didn’t have any military experience, but the Marines took him anyway because he is a competitive shooter and, more important, speaks Ukrainian and Russian.

Neither Mr. Hayward nor Anton received any formal paperwork from the Ukrainian military, or signed any contract. This week, following an informal referral from the Mykolaiv-based Marines, Anton and Mr. Hayward moved to the Zaporizhzhia region to hook up with the 128th Brigade. They started off by “fixing” three supposedly malfunctioning CLUs after realizing a mistake in the brigade’s translation of the manual.

One soldier leaving the class, Serhiy, recalled how he fought against Russian forces in Donbas in 2018. “At the time, their tanks used to drive up and shoot straight at us, and there was nothing we could do,” he said. “I wish we had Javelins back then.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 Oil middlemen fueled Russia; getting out
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-oil-sanctions-europe-middlemen-fueled-putins-war-machine-now-theyre-getting-out-trafigura-11651166288?mod=hp_lead_pos9
GIST	<p>Russia built a self-proclaimed fortress around its economy in the run-up to war—but there was a crack. Moscow depended on foreign middlemen to ferry its most strategic and lucrative export around the world: oil.</p> <p>Now the most-important middleman, Trafigura Group, is joining several competitors in cutting off Russian giant Rosneft Oil Co. from global oil markets. In a high-stakes move that goes farther than official Western sanctions, the Swiss commodities trader plans to stop exporting Rosneft’s crude altogether. It will cut its business with the state producer to a sliver of prewar levels, supplying only some refined products such as diesel into Europe, according to a spokeswoman.</p> <p>Trafigura and other traders were already poised to lose a big chunk of their Russian business on May 15, when sanctions go into effect that bar them from selling Rosneft oil to countries outside the European Union and Switzerland. In also deciding to cut exports to Europe, long the biggest buyer of Russian oil, they are getting ahead of EU countries that are discussing a full ban.</p> <p>Vitol, Trafigura’s biggest competitor in oil, also plans to retreat from the Russian market, according to people familiar with the decision. Glencore PLC, a mining and trading giant with a long history in Russia, suspended its contract to export Rosneft oil in March, people familiar with the decision said.</p>

It marks a shift for the traders, which have long done business where few other Western companies would dare, given that many of the world's valuable commodities are found in places that have struggled with corruption, instability and war.

While the traders continued to ship Russian oil after war broke out, they faced mounting pressures from Western governments, financial institutions and Ukrainian officials. A huge drop in European demand, given the stigma of sending petrodollars to Moscow, made the decision easier.

"The world has changed," said Jean-François Lambert, a consultant to the commodities industry and former head of commodities trade finance at [HSBC](#). "We are not in a twilight situation. We are in a black-and-white situation."

Their disengagement is forcing Russia to hastily rework its commodity-export business, [the foundation of the country's economic wealth](#) and the feedstock for [Vladimir Putin](#)'s war machine. Rosneft accounts for about a third of Russia's total oil production and about a fifth of the government's revenues.

The retreat will also likely mean substantial losses on investments the traders made in the country as they sought to deepen their roots, such as [a giant drilling project in the Arctic Circle partly owned by Trafigura and Vitol](#). On the core business of trading, the merchants face risks as they pull out, as a messy unwinding from Russia could stick them with millions of barrels of unsalable oil if they aren't adroit.

Trafigura, like many traders, is privately held and offers less disclosure about its operations and financial results than public companies. Owned by its 1,000-odd partners, it competes with the likes of Vitol and Geneva-based Gunvor Group as well as the trading arms of oil producers including BP PLC and Shell PLC.

Headed by Australian Chief Executive Jeremy Weir, the firm is legally based in Singapore, though its top executives operate out of a bland seven-story office building in Geneva with a pharmacy on the ground level.

The company generates almost twice as much revenue as [Facebook](#) owner Meta Platforms. It churned out a profit of \$3.1 billion in the year through last September.

Last month, Trafigura announced [it had doubled the size of a credit facility with banks to more than \\$2 billion](#) to weather extreme price moves sparked by the war in Ukraine. A set of Trafigura bonds issued late last year have fallen nearly 10% since just before the start of the war. Bonds of other commodity traders fell in price, too.

Trafigura dates back to a bust-up in 1993 at Marc Rich & Co., run by trader and fugitive from U.S. justice Marc Rich. Trafigura—a name plucked from a selection of registered Dutch companies—struck out as a breakaway and expanded under founder Claude Dauphin.

Post-Soviet Russia was a highly sought-after prize. The country emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union as a commodities superstore. It is [the world's biggest exporter of oil and a huge producer of natural gas, wheat, nickel, gold and more besides](#).

Together Trafigura and its competitors have channeled billions of dollars to Rosneft from Western lenders and invested in oil fields and port terminals in Russia—to endear themselves to producers in the country and gain access to their oil, current and former industry executives say.

Trafigura was late to the game in Russia, lagging Vitol, Glencore and others. It got its break in 2013 when it struck a \$1.5 billion deal with Rosneft that followed a \$10 billion deal between the Russian producer and those rivals.

The money helped fund [Rosneft's purchase of TNK-BP](#), a bumper deal that turned the state-aligned company into the world's biggest listed oil producer. Mr. Dauphin hired away TNK's top traders, gaining

access to Russian business circles that Trafigura had previously lacked. Israeli-Canadian trader Jonathan Kollek—who had spent more than two decades working in Russian oil, starting at Marc Rich & Co., according to former colleagues—led Trafigura’s new outfit in Moscow.

Trafigura didn’t make Mr. Kollek available for an interview.

The relationship between Rosneft and Trafigura grew stronger after Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea. Rosneft was in a pinch. It faced a wall of debt and sanctions imposed after the annexation banned Western banks from making loans that lasted longer than 30 days.

Trafigura, armed with a giant balance sheet and with ready access to financing from Western banks and the global bond market, swooped in. It agreed to buy oil in huge quantities and pay 25 days up front, easing the cash crunch at Rosneft. Trafigura catapulted above Vitol and Glencore to become the biggest Western exporter of Russian crude in 2015.

“There’s no sanctions on oil trading in Russia, and therefore it’s business as usual,” said Mr. Weir at the time.

Trafigura went on to deepen its ties with Russia, striking deals beyond trading. It bought an Indian oil refinery with Rosneft. And it plowed the equivalent of \$8.4 billion into Rosneft’s vast Vostok Arctic oil field in return for more barrels and a 10% stake in the project, largely funded by a Russian bank.

Rosneft—which counts a Russian state-owned company as its largest shareholder—is run by CEO Igor Sechin, a close ally of President Putin. Mr. Sechin’s strategy was to grant barrels of oil in return for funding and investments, all the while playing Trafigura, Vitol and Glencore off against each other, said Mr. Lambert, the former banker. “If the price is you invest one billion here, one billion there and you can afford it, you do it,” he said.

Physical commodity markets are opaque. But data tracking shipments from Russian ports and calculations by rival companies suggest Trafigura grew to be by far the biggest exporter of Rosneft oil. Last year, it shipped about 519,000 barrels a day, according to oil-tracking firm Petro-Logistics, more than twice as much as second-place Gunvor. Including oil from private Russian energy companies, Trafigura was the second-biggest exporter of Russian oil behind Litasco, the trading arm of Moscow-based producer [Lukoil](#), the data show.

A Trafigura spokeswoman called the data “materially incomplete and inaccurate” but declined to provide the company’s own figures.

When Mr. Putin invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, Trafigura’s big Russian bet began to boomerang.

Details of agreements between Trafigura and Rosneft aren’t disclosed. But people familiar with their terms say Trafigura, and its rivals, agree to long-term contracts to buy millions of barrels of Russian oil with prices set according to formulas based on recent prices of oil benchmarks.

Russia locks in a steady buyer of its oil, and Trafigura makes a profit by selling the oil at a slightly higher price to refiners and traders in Europe and Asia.

That recipe came undone when Russia invaded Ukraine. [Global markets for Russia’s flagship Urals crude tanked](#), selling at roughly a \$30 a barrel discount compared with Brent, the international benchmark. It usually sells for around the same amount.

Trafigura and the other middlemen struggled to find companies to sell to, particularly in the West. “Not many,” Mr. Weir said at a conference in late March when asked how many buyers there were for Russian oil.

They found takers farther afield. Cargoes that once headed to Europe instead traveled to markets such as India, which has avoided denouncing the war and [scooped up Russian oil on the cheap](#).

Unlike oil giant BP, which rapidly declared its intent to quit Russia in the days after the invasion, Trafigura and some other traders were more circumspect. [Trafigura froze its investment in Vostok](#) without detailing what that entailed, and industry executives expect the company to absorb a large loss on the project.

After a dialogue with European government officials and external lawyers about EU and Swiss sanctions targeting Rosneft, Trafigura decided to stop selling oil from the state company elsewhere in the world beyond May 15, even though it theoretically could have skirted the sanctions by operating through offshore units.

Even sales in Europe turned dicey, as numerous refiners and government officials on the continent balked at the thought of buying Russian oil.

With few takers, Trafigura could have been stuck buying oil from Russia based on its contract with Rosneft with nowhere to sell it.

France and other countries are urging a more sweeping ban on Russian oil that would halt sales in the EU, too. Meanwhile, staff at some ports are unwilling to unload shipments.

With the walls closing in on the traders, Moscow will have to turn elsewhere if it is to keep selling its oil. One option is to sell directly to select customers in Asia. Another is to build new pipelines to transport oil directly to China. A third is to replace Trafigura and others with smaller traders in the Middle East.

Smaller companies might be able to dance around the sanctions, for example by dealing out of non-European subsidiaries. But the big players likely can't risk undermining their relationships with banks by flouting the spirit of the rules, lawyers and traders say.

Rosneft is dashing to sell oil while it still can, and struggling. In recent days, the state producer [failed to find buyers for tens of millions of barrels of crude it put up for sale](#) after the traders began to leave Russia.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Fire-weather conditions Southwest, Plains
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/04/28/fire-danger-plains-southwest-newmexico/
GIST	<p>A severe-to-exceptional drought is continuing to parch the West and the Plains, with scant rainfall and increasing temperatures desiccating the landscape in recent months. Reservoirs are scraping rock bottom, and wildfire season is raging.</p> <p>Last week, a swarm of fires erupted in the Southwest and the western Plains. New Mexico was hit particularly hard, with more than 20 active blazes Friday and Saturday that destroyed more than 200 structures. As of Tuesday, five large fires were still burning in the state, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.</p> <p>New Mexico has seen 184 wildfires burn over 135,000 acres in 2022, which is more than the entirety of last year. By themselves, the Calf Canyon and Hermits Peak fires in Santa Fe National Forest, just 33 percent contained, had consumed more than 60,000 acres.</p> <p>Although conditions favorable for fires relaxed early this week, they are again becoming conducive for existing blazes to spread and new ones to rapidly grow.</p> <p>On Thursday, the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center placed much of Arizona, New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle under an “elevated” or higher-end “critical” risk category for fires.</p>

The risk expands slightly east and peaks Friday with the elevated fire risk zone covering much of New Mexico, eastern Colorado, the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles and western Kansas. Within this zone, a large area is expected to see critical fire-weather conditions, including Albuquerque, Colorado Springs and Amarillo, Tex. A small portion of southeast Colorado, including Pueblo, is under a top-tier “extremely critical” fire risk.

An “outbreak of dangerous fire-weather conditions [is] expected,” the Storm Prediction Center wrote. Red-flag warnings for high fire danger and high-wind warnings are up for much of the at-risk region.

By the weekend, lingering dry conditions mean the fire danger will persist over parts of the Southwest and southern Plains.

The setup

The dangerous fire conditions are set to develop as a combination of scant rainfall, startlingly low relative humidity and strong, gusty winds turn the Southwest and the western Plains into a tinderbox.

On Thursday, low pressure will emerge east of the Rockies, strengthening en route to the Corn Belt on Friday and Friday night. This will cause winds from the west and northwest to increase.

Trailing south from the low-pressure zone will be a dryline that is the leading edge of arid air from the Desert Southwest.

Weather models simulate the dryline wobbling back and forth over the Southern Plains and New Mexico into Saturday. Areas west of the dryline will see relative humidity percentages in the bone-dry teens and single digits.

The dry air comes as the land surface has been stripped of much of its moisture. Three-month rainfall across most of West Texas, eastern New Mexico and the High Plains is running 3 inches or more behind, or roughly 25 percent of normal. Soil moisture is in the bottom fifth percentile.

Meanwhile, gusty winds are expected to pick up behind the dryline, with west-to-northwest gusts approaching 35 to 50 mph. That will make things even worse, since air that undergoes “downsloping,” descending down the Rockies from high elevation to lower altitudes, is compressed by increasing air pressure near the surface. That induces warming, drying and acceleration, further strengthening winds. The situation will be most extreme on Friday.

“This volatile combination of strong/gusty surface winds and anomalously low [humidity] atop critically dry fuels will foster extreme fire-weather behavior during the afternoon hours,” the Storm Prediction Center wrote.

Gusts may ease for a time on Saturday, but it will remain dry and windy enough for the fire threat to linger over the weekend.

The fire season so far and increasing risk days

More than 20,000 fires have burned over 1 million acres in 2022 in the country. “This continues to be well above the 10-year average of 14,958 wildfires that burned 727,141 acres,” the National Interagency Fire Center wrote.

Rising temperatures from human-caused climate change are increasing the risk of wildfires by more rapidly drying out vegetation and making it more flammable.

Climate Central, a nonprofit science communications organization, [analyzed](#) how the number of “fire weather” days — days with a volatile combination of high winds, low humidity and hot temperatures — changed in the West between 1973 and 2020. It [found](#) that much of the West saw a trend toward more such days, with New Mexico experiencing some of the greatest increases.

HEADLINE	04/28 Bay Area Rapid Transit reinstates masks
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/world/san-francisco-bart-mask-mandate.html
GIST	<p>Masks will again be required on Bay Area Rapid Transit, making the largest transit system in the San Francisco area the only one currently enforcing a masking requirement.</p> <p>In a meeting on Thursday, the agency's board of directors approved a temporary amendment to the Bay Area district's code of conduct that requires riders to wear masks in the system, with limited exceptions. The decision will be effective until July 18, and could be extended by the board.</p> <p>In more than an hour of call-in testimony from the community, officials said, there was extensive support for a mandate to protect transit-dependent communities, people with underlying health conditions and children under 5, who are not yet eligible for vaccination.</p> <p>For the most part, riders in the Bay Area have not been resistant to mask wearing. "Most people who don't have a mask on simply take the free mask provided by police and put it on," said Alicia Trost, a spokeswoman for the transit system. The agency said on Twitter that "free masks are available at station agent booths and from all safety staff for those who need one."</p> <p>Dr. John Swartzberg, a professor at University of California, Berkeley, said he was "absolutely delighted" with the decision, as an infectious disease specialist and a professor of public health — and as a grandfather. He said his teenage granddaughter uses the transit system to get to and from her high school in San Francisco, 40 minutes each way.</p> <p>The reinstatement came 10 days after a federal judge in Florida struck down a nationwide mask requirement for public transit systems and airlines, leaving those entities to set their own rules. The Justice Department is appealing the Florida ruling. Like other transit agencies in the Bay Area, BART's previous mandate had been based on the federal directive.</p> <p>"We believe we are the only transit agency in the country to adopt their own mandate," Ms. Trost said. A state mandate requires riders to wear masks on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City, and a county mandate enforces masking on the Los Angeles Metro Rail.</p> <p>After the Florida ruling, the California Department of Public Health updated its guidance to strongly urge rather than require riders on public transit to wear masks. In an order last week, Los Angeles County retained the mask mandate for travelers aboard public transit and in indoor transportation hubs, like airports.</p> <p>Barbara Ferrer, the Los Angeles County health director, said the county was extending the mask requirement because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had not changed its guidance that face coverings were still necessary on public transit.</p> <p>"We obviously have a very dangerous virus that is still in circulation that can really wreak havoc," Dr. Ferrer said in a news briefing last week. She added, "I think we have carved a very sensible path for the county right now, which is that we have denoted some settings where there is much higher risk, and are layering in more protections in those settings."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Report identifies China bioweapons sites
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/28/state-department-identifies-two-chinese-bioweapons/
GIST	China carried out offensive biological weapons work until 1987 and failed to disclose the full extent of the activities for years as required under an international agreement, according to the State Department's annual report on arms treaty compliance.

Additionally, Chinese officials for the second year in a row have refused a meeting with U.S. counterparts to discuss ongoing concerns about China's biological warfare activities.

China is required under the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, signed by Beijing in 1984, to disclose all activities related to current or past biological warfare programs.

"The People's Republic of China (PRC) continued to engage in activities with dual-use applications, which raise concerns regarding its compliance with Article I of the BWC," said the report, made public last week. Article I strictly prohibits developing or stockpiling biological weapons.

The report said the U.S. government was unable to determine whether China eliminated past biological weapons as required under the Biological Weapons Convention.

The report for the first time identifies two known Chinese biological weapons production facilities, one in Beijing and a second in Lingbao, in Henan province. The Lingbao plant is near Wuhan, the city where the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 first emerged.

The Chinese offensive biological weapons program began in the 1950s and continued through at least the 1980s, the report said.

"Reporting suggests that the PRC's [biological weapons] production occurred at two facilities, in Beijing and Lingbao, prior to the PRC's signing of the BWC in 1972." The last operational germ weapons production plant in Lingbao ceased activities in 1987.

"Although the PRC has submitted BWC confidence-building measures (CBMs) each year since 1989, the PRC's CBM reporting has never declared these facilities or otherwise disclosed it ever pursued an offensive BW program, and the PRC has never acknowledged publicly or in diplomatic channels its past offensive program," the report said.

The biological weapons produced by China in the past include weaponized ricin, botulinum toxins and causative agents for anthrax, cholera, plague and tularemia, the report said.

The latest report changed its assessment of the development of those weapons from "probably" to "reportedly," an apparent increase in the level of certainty likely based on intelligence agencies' findings.

Studies conducted by the People's Liberation Army at military medical institutions have stated that the military has worked on identifying and testing "diverse families of potent toxins with dual-use applications," the report said. More information on the Chinese bioweapons program was contained in a classified annex, the report authors said.

"The United States has compliance concerns with respect to Chinese military medical institutions' toxin and biotechnology research and development because of the dual-use applications and their potential as a biological threat," the report said.

The report said there was no evidence that China had taken steps to destroy its biological weapons or divert them to peaceful purposes as required by the Biological Weapons Convention. China refused to meet with U.S. officials last year, the period covered by the latest compliance report. The Biden administration sought the meeting to resolve the compliance issues.

"A new date had been proposed for early 2022, but the PRC again cancelled the meeting," the report said.

Al Mauroni, director of the Air Force Center for Strategic Deterrence Studies, wrote in a recent journal article that unclassified assessments by the Pentagon and State Department suggest China could now have a biological weapons capability and U.S. officials believe Beijing is not complying with the Biological Weapons Convention.

“In the event of a future conflict with great powers, there is the chance that biological warfare could emerge as a significant threat, perhaps in a form unrecognized from Cold War experiences,” Mr. Mauroni wrote in an article titled “On Biological War,” in the current issue of the Army journal Military Review.

Mr. Mauroni said China’s investment in biotechnology, specifically synthetic biology, has created the base for producing “a range of extant and novel biological warfare agents.”

As for use in a future conflict, China’s clandestine biological weapons program could offer “a capability to perform single, small-scale chemical or biological weapons attacks on focused targets (facilities or individuals) while claiming to be compliant with the BWC.”

Mr. Mauroni said Western military forces are unable to detect biological weapons until after exposure and U.S. forces lack vaccines for a number of known biological warfare agents or engineered diseases.

The Washington Times, citing U.S. officials with access to intelligence reports, reported in May 2020 that China was working on biological weapons designed to attack specific ethnic groups.

‘Ethnic genetic attacks’

“We are looking at potential biological experiments on ethnic minorities,” one senior U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told The Times.

Information regarding Chinese ethnic bioweapons research was obtained from people with knowledge of the program. A Chinese general stated in a 2017 book that advances in biotechnology made “specific ethnic genetic attacks” more likely in conflict.

China’s National Defense University also has reported that the Chinese military is preparing for “specific ethnic genetic attacks.”

The State Department concluded last year that China has engaged in a policy of genocide against minority Uyghurs in western China.

The latest arms compliance report made no mention of the Wuhan Institute of Virology. A State Department report made public in January 2021 said the institute was engaged in secret military work.

“For many years the United States has publicly raised concerns about China’s past biological weapons work, which Beijing has neither documented nor demonstrably eliminated, despite its clear obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention,” the 2021 report on the Wuhan facility said.

Despite posing as a civilian facility, the Wuhan institute “collaborated on publications and secret projects with China’s military,” the report said.

“The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017,” the report said.

Chinese Embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu said China strictly fulfills its obligations under the biological weapons treaty.

“China firmly defends the lawful right of developing countries to enjoy the dividend of biotechnological development,” he said, calling on the United States to provide details of what he called Washington’s own “bio-military activities.”

China’s state-owned media in recent weeks have echoed Russian accusations about a string of “covert” U.S.-funded biological research laboratories in Ukraine. U.S. and Ukrainian officials have vehemently denied suggestions that the labs were conducting biowarfare experiments or that the research was conducted in secret.

Two former State Department arms control leaders, Thomas DiNanno and Paula A. DeSutter, said in a report last year that the Biden administration was attempting to play down Chinese violations of the international agreement by omitting information about secret virus research from last year's arms compliance report.

"This omission serves as a signal to China and other adversaries and to our allies that the United States is not concerned about the potentially dangerous dual-use research that was being conducted at the WIV and its affiliated facilities," Mr. DiNanno and Ms. DeSutter wrote at the time. They said the State Department "must determine the extent of potential Chinese weaponization of viruses."

Recent statements by Chinese officials have indicated that the military is interested in pursuing offensive biological arms.

"For example, in 2015, then-President of the Academy of Military Medical Sciences He Fuchu argued that biotechnology would become the new 'strategic commanding heights' of national defense, ranging from biomaterials to 'brain control' weapons," Mr. DiNanno and Ms. DeSutter said.

John Ratcliffe, director of national intelligence under President Trump, has said U.S. intelligence information indicates China "conducted human testing on members of the People's Liberation Army in hope of developing soldiers with biologically enhanced capabilities."

Current DNI Avril Haines said in recent congressional testimony that the COVID-19 pandemic and the global response to it could prompt U.S. adversaries to consider developing biological weapons.

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HEADLINE	04/28 DHS under fire; 'disinformation' board lead
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/28/dhs-under-fire-over-pick-lead-new-disinformation-b/
GIST	<p>Former Homeland Security Department leaders warned that the Biden administration had unleashed Orwellian thought police on Americans after the department revealed that its "disinformation" board to stop online misinformation is run by a woman who has spread disinformation and questioned First Amendment rights.</p> <p>Nina Jankowicz, who once dismissed troubling reports about Hunter Biden's laptop as a "Trump campaign ploy," has been leading the new board for a couple of months, but Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas did not reveal the board's existence until this week in testimony to Congress.</p> <p>"The goal is to bring the resources of the department together to address this threat," Mr. Mayorkas told lawmakers.</p> <p>"Cat's out of the bag," Ms. Jankowicz then tweeted.</p> <p>Homeland Security described the board's expansive duties, saying it will combat the wide swath of disinformation in the country. In the immediate term, its focus will be on disinformation surrounding Russia's invasion of Ukraine and on the messaging smuggling groups are peddling to would-be illegal immigrants, the department said.</p> <p>Mr. Mayorkas also suggested it will deal with election information.</p> <p>That broad charge of duties, and the appointment of Ms. Jankowicz as its lead, stunned some former department officials.</p> <p>"Secretary Mayorkas wants to implement the lesson of every dictator: that is to be the sole owner of what qualifies as 'truth.' George Orwell would be proud," former Deputy Homeland Security Secretary Ken Cuccinelli told The Washington Times.</p>

Lora Ries, a former homeland security deputy chief of staff and the director of the conservative Heritage Foundation's Border Security and Immigration Center, called the board "an overtly political ploy" to try to chase opposing viewpoints from the political debate ahead of the midterm elections.

"The left can no longer use COVID restrictions, or now, seemingly Twitter, to mislabel and hide legitimate information American voters should have in casting their ballots. Instead, they are standing up this board to declare what the left believes is mis- or disinformation," Ms. Ries said.

She said policing disinformation "is not remotely the mission of the Department of Homeland Security."

Sen. Marco Rubio, Florida Republican, called the board a "speech police."

The disinformation board isn't Mr. Mayorkas' first foray into disinformation. Last year, he told Congress he was working with the Education Department on a program to help schoolchildren spot when they are being fed dangerous information.

In his testimony, Mr. Mayorkas said the new board was led by Robert Silvers, undersecretary for policy, and Jennifer Daskal, principal deputy general counsel at Homeland Security.

Homeland Security then revealed the board was "led" by Ms. Jankowicz, and Ms. Silvers and Ms. Daskal were co-chairs.

Ms. Jankowicz has been a fellow at the Wilson Center working on Russian propaganda efforts. She also has been an adviser to Ukraine.

In 2020, as explosive reports of Hunter Biden's laptop roiled the presidential campaign, Ms. Jankowicz told the New York Daily News that she thought it was disinformation spread by the Trump campaign.

Reporting by several news organizations has since substantiated the authenticity of the laptop, which was first reported by the New York Post.

Ms. Jankowicz also has expressed skepticism about the long-held belief of First Amendment advocates that the answer to bad messaging is more good messaging, according to a 2020 piece in The New Yorker. She says the solution lies in crafting a more just society where the dissonant voices feel heard.

Ms. Jankowicz has just published "How To Be a Woman Online," a book about facing internet abuse and harassment. She detailed some of the "unsettling and creepy" messages she has received since she has become a public figure making television appearances.

Ms. Jankowicz, a prolific tweeter, confirmed her position in a post on Wednesday. She insisted that she isn't a threat to robust speech and that a "key" reason the board was created was to protect "free speech, privacy, civil rights [and] civil liberties."

She made that declaration after posting her official photo, which she told Twitter users she did "to grab your attention."

Asked Thursday about her history, Mr. Mayorkas said he was "not familiar with those statements."

Rep. Jim Jordan, Ohio Republican, pressed Mr. Mayorkas on whether premature rejections of theories that the coronavirus emerged from a Chinese lab would be considered targets for the disinformation board. He also wondered whether those who denied the Biden laptop story would be targets.

Mr. Mayorkas said the board's focus would be information "that imperils the safety and security of the homeland," with an emphasis on anything connected "to violence."

The new board's two immediate priorities, Russian propaganda and smuggling cartels' messaging, have proved hard to combat over the years.

In the smuggling context, that's because the story cartels are selling would-be migrants about chances of securing a foothold in the U.S. often turns out to be true.

In fact, migrants are posting success stories after being caught and released at the border, experts said, which is fueling an even bigger market for the cartels.

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HEADLINE	04/29 Day 65 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-65-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia attacked western Kyiv with two cruise missiles during a visit by the UN secretary general, António Guterres, to the Ukrainian capital. Two loud explosions rocked Kyiv on Thursday evening after Guterres visited the site of massacres and mass graves on the city's outskirts. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said the strikes happened "immediately after" his talks with the UN chief.• Ten were injured in the blast, which hit the central Shevchenkivskiy district, and three people were hospitalised, according to Ukraine's state emergency service. A 25-storey residential building was partially destroyed.• In his latest address, Zelenskiy addressed the strike on Kyiv, saying that Ukraine could not let its guard down. "Moscow claimed they had allegedly ceased fire in Mariupol. But the bombing of the defenders of the city continues," he said. "This is a war crime committed by the Russian military literally in front of the whole world."• The UK will send 8,000 soldiers to eastern Europe on expanded exercises to combat Russian aggression in one of the largest deployments since the cold war. Dozens of tanks will be deployed to countries ranging from Finland to North Macedonia between April and June.• Joe Biden has called for a giant \$33bn package of military and economic aid to Ukraine, more than doubling the level of US assistance to date. The package would include over \$20bn in military aid, including heavy artillery and armoured vehicles, greater intelligence sharing, cyberwarfare tools and many more anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. "We're not attacking Russia. We're helping Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression," Biden said.• A British citizen has been killed in Ukraine and a second is missing, the Foreign Office has confirmed, amid reports that both were volunteers who had gone to fight in the country. The Briton who died was understood to be Scott Sibley, a former British soldier who had served in Iraq.• Russian forces have been hitting the Azovstal steelworks in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol with the heaviest strikes yet, a local official said. Meanwhile, a senior US defence official said the US had seen indications that some Russian forces were leaving Mariupol and moving towards the north-west, even as fighting for the Ukrainian port city continued.• The UN secretary general, Guterres, said the UN was "doing everything possible" to evacuate people from the Azovstal steelworks in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol. "They need an escape route out of the apocalypse," Guterres said. Zelenskiy added that he believed that a "successful result" was still possible "in terms of deblocking" the Mariupol plant.• The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it was probing a report that a missile had flown directly over a nuclear power station, adding it would be "extremely serious" if true. The IAEA director general, Rafael Grossi, said Kyiv had formally told the agency the missile flew over the plant in southern Ukraine on 16 April. The facility is near the city of Yuzhnoukrainsk, 350km (220 miles) south of Kyiv.• The UN general assembly will vote on 11 May replacing Russia on the world organisation's leading human rights body after its suspension over allegations of rights violations by Russian

	<p>soldiers in Ukraine. Assembly spokeswoman Paulina Kubiak said the Czech Republic was the only candidate for the seat on the 47-member human rights council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine’s prosecutor general has named 10 Russian soldiers allegedly involved in human rights abuses during the month-long occupation of Bucha. There were 8,653 alleged war crimes under investigation, according to the prosecutor’s office. • Guterres described the war as “an absurdity” in the 21st century on a visit to the scene of civilian killings outside Kyiv. Guterres was touring Borodianka, where Russian forces are accused of massacring civilians before their withdrawal, on his first visit to Ukraine since the start of the invasion. • Moldova’s deputy prime minister, Nicu Popescu, said the country was facing “a very dangerous new moment” as unnamed forces were seeking to stoke tensions after a series of explosions in the breakaway region of Transnistria this week. Popescu said his government had seen “a dangerous deterioration of the situation” in recent days amid attacks in the region. • The European Union will consider it as a violation of sanctions if European energy companies comply with Moscow’s requirement to open a payment account in roubles with Gazprombank, EU officials warned. The EU “cannot accept” that payments in euros for Russian gas are considered completed by Moscow only after they are converted into roubles, an official said. • Nato said it was ready to maintain its support for Ukraine in the war against Russia for years, including help for Kyiv to shift from Soviet-era weapons to modern western arms and systems. “We need to be prepared for the long term,” Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato secretary general, told a summit in Brussels. “There is absolutely the possibility that this war will drag on and last for months and years.”
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HEADLINE	04/29 Israel police, Palestinians clash Jerusalem
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/israeli-police-and-palestinians-clash-at-al-aqsa-mosque-in-jerusalem
GIST	<p>Israeli police have fired rubber bullets and stun grenades towards Palestinian youths who were throwing rocks in the latest outbreak of violence at Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque, a site revered by Muslims and Jews.</p> <p>At least 42 Palestinians were injured in the early morning clashes on Friday at Islam’s third-holiest site, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.</p> <p>Israeli police said they intervened when hundreds of people began hurling rocks and fireworks, including in the direction of the Western Wall, where Jewish worshippers gather.</p> <p>Police said in a statement: “We will continue to act decisively against rioters and outlaws for public safety and security.”</p> <p>There were almost daily confrontations at the mosque this month when Ramadan overlapped with the Jewish celebration of Passover, which brought hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Jews to the heavily policed site in the old city.</p> <p>However, the violence had abated this week following the end of Passover and after Israel halted Jewish visits to the huge esplanade, which is home to the gilded seventh-century Dome of the Rock and the eighth-century al-Aqsa mosque.</p> <p>The compound is Judaism’s holiest site and the vestige of two ancient Jewish temples.</p> <p>Ramadan ends next week and large crowds often gather on the final Friday of the fasting month at al-Aqsa mosque.</p>

	<p>Israeli officials have blamed tensions this month on Islamist groups, including Hamas, which rules the Palestinian enclave Gaza, saying they have encouraged youths to stage riots aimed at stirring anger in the Muslim world against Israel.</p> <p>Palestinians accused Israel of not doing enough to enforce a longstanding ban on Jewish prayer on the esplanade. Israel rejects this accusation.</p> <p>The al-Aqsa compound sits on top of the old city plateau of East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in a move that has not won international recognition. Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a state they seek to establish in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 FDA moves to ban menthol cigarettes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/28/us-fda-menthol-cigarettes-flavored-cigars-ban-rules
GIST	<p>The US Food and Drug Administration on Thursday issued a long-awaited proposal to ban menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, a major victory for anti-smoking advocates but one that could dent sales at tobacco companies.</p> <p>The proposal, which comes a year after the agency announced the plan, still needs to be finalized, and could take years to implement as it is likely to face stiff opposition from big tobacco.</p> <p>“The proposed rules would help prevent children from becoming the next generation of smokers and help adult smokers quit,” said the health and human services secretary, Xavier Becerra.</p> <p>For decades, menthol cigarettes have been in the crosshairs of anti-smoking groups who have argued that they contribute to disproportionate health burdens on Black communities and play a role in luring young people into smoking.</p> <p>Menthol cigarettes, banned in many states including California and Massachusetts, account for more than a third of the industry’s overall market share in the United States, even as overall smoking rates have been declining in the country.</p> <p>In 2019, there were more than 18.5m menthol cigarette smokers ages 12 and older in the country, with particularly high rates of use by youth, young adults, and African American and other racial and ethnic groups, the agency said.</p> <p>Shares of Altria, British America Tobacco and Imperial Brands were mixed in afternoon trading.</p> <p>“We believe harm reduction, not prohibition, is the better path forward,” Altria said in a statement.</p> <p>“Taking these products out of the legal marketplace will push them into unregulated, criminal markets that don’t follow any regulations and ignore minimum age laws.”</p> <p>BAT and Imperial did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The FDA said the public can submit their comments on the rule through 5 July from 5 May, and it will decide whether to issue a final ruling after reviewing them.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 China: NATO messing up Europe
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/china-says-nato-is-messing-up-europe-and-warns-over-role-in-asia-pacific

GIST	<p>China's ministry of foreign affairs has accused Nato of messing up Europe and stirring up conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region, after the UK's foreign secretary told China it should "play by the rules".</p> <p>In a speech at Mansion House in London on Wednesday, Liz Truss renewed calls to boost Nato in the wake of the Ukraine war, and said the coordinated moves to isolate Russia from the world economy proved that market access to democratic countries was no longer a given. Truss also delivered a direct warning to China.</p> <p>"Countries must play by the rules. And that includes China," she said.</p> <p>On Thursday Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for China's ministry of foreign affairs, dismissed Truss's comments and accused Nato of demanding other countries abide by basic norms while it has "wantonly waged wars and dropped bombs in sovereign states, killing and displacing innocent civilians".</p> <p>"Nato, a military organisation in the North Atlantic, has in recent years come to the Asia-Pacific region to throw its weight around and stir up conflicts," Wang said.</p> <p>"Nato has messed up Europe. Is it now trying to mess up the Asia-Pacific and even the world?"</p> <p>In her speech Truss said Nato had to pre-empt threats in the Indo-Pacific and extend its outlook to democracies outside its membership, like Taiwan, which Beijing claims is a breakaway Chinese province it must retake. She suggested China's economic rise – now the world's second largest economy to Britain's sixth – could be targeted.</p> <p>"[China] will not continue to rise if they do not play by the rules. China needs trade with the G7. We [the Group of Seven] represent around half of the global economy. And we have choices," Truss said.</p> <p>"We have shown with Russia the kind of choices that we're prepared to make when international rules are violated."</p> <p>China has refused to condemn the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, one of its closest allies, drawing criticism and urgings from European and other governments to use its influence on Moscow. A recent China-EU summit was reportedly strained as Chinese representatives rebuffed pressure by European counterparts to help end the war. Premier Li Keqiang said Beijing would pursue peace "in its own way".</p> <p>Beijing firmly opposes linking the Ukraine war to its relations with Moscow and has said it will defend the rights of Chinese individuals and companies. On Thursday Wang said China's position on the conflict had been "consistent and clear".</p> <p>"We have always made independent judgments based on the merits of the case," he said, adding no further detail.</p> <p>Truss has previously accused China and Russia being "aggressors working in concert", telling Australian media she couldn't rule out China using Russia's invasion as an opportunity to launch its own act of aggression.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Snohomish Co. tons of backlogged garbage
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/2-million-emergency-contract-to-help-remove-backlogged-trash-in-snohomish-county
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. - Snohomish County Public Works is asking people to pause taking out their trash for the next week or two.</p> <p>Crews are working overtime to clear a backlog of garbage at its transfer facilities. The county approved a \$2 million emergency contract with removal company Waste Management to help clear the garbage.</p>

50% of the county's garbage haul goes to the Airport Recycle and Transfer Station (ARTS) in Everett. The facility is currently overflowing with 3,500 tons of waste.

"Simply put, there's more garbage coming in the door than we can get out the door," said David Schonhard, solid waste director for Snohomish County Public Works.

Schonhard said the county's transfer stations are not seeing a higher volume in garbage, but rather, a decrease in available containers to put the garbage in and lack of rail service to send it by train to a landfill in eastern Washington.

"Our service vendor normally gives us enough containers that we can process it in real-time and get it to the landfill. And when we see a lack of containers, it starts to build up because we don't have enough garbage cans to put it in. So, we stack it," said Schonhard. "We don't have a local landfill to take this to. So, we're really dependent on that rail network to work. And when it slows down, even a little bit, it has a huge ripple effect on our system."

At the ARTS facility, there is enough trash to pack 150 containers, when normally crews at the facility would fill up to 40 containers per day.

"Usually, we try to always have as clean a deck as we can, so that when we close the facility at the end of the day, there's nothing left that would cause a fire or do anything damaging to the facility. And it makes it better for the next day's business. We stay with a clean slate and do it again," said Schonhard. "It's really unprecedented. We've had hiccups in the system before, but this is by large the biggest pile of garbage we've had inside this facility."

Kelly Snyder, director of Snohomish County Public Works, said the trash backlog goes beyond the Everett location.

"Not just for Snohomish County, but Island County, Skagit County, Whatcom County, up into British Columbia. So, this is a regional issue," said Snyder.

"We're all using the rail service to use a regional landfill in Eastern Washington. And so when that piece of the link breaks, we're all looking for solutions," said Schonhard.

Public Works crews trying digging their way out is practically impossible, since the shipping and container shortage is happening around the world, and the rail system is limited across the region. County government approved a \$2 million emergency contract with removal company Waste Management to help get it out.

"They will help us come and help clean the decks. They have some additional capacity with containers. We'll hopefully be able to clear this out in a couple of weeks and sort of stabilize the system a little bit," said Snyder.

Snyder explained Waste Management runs on a different rail system and has its own landfill in eastern Oregon where a lot of the county's backlogged trash will go.

"We need to make sure that these are not health and safety issues and environmental issues. So, the quicker we can resolve that, the better the whole environment will be," said Snyder.

In the meantime, the ARTS facility is under a 24/7 fire watch until the tower of trash is cleared.

"To be honest, when I do come in and see a pile like this I'm terrified. It's very dangerous, things fall off. We have the issue of the piles get warm—as garbage sits, it decomposes, generates heat and actually becomes a fire hazard. And you can imagine something like this catches fire, the damage it can do to a facility," said Schonhard.

HEADLINE	04/28 China suspends import tariffs on coal
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/28/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#china-russia-tariffs-coal
GIST	<p>BEIJING — The Chinese government will suspend its tariff on imported coal starting on Sunday, a decision that will likely benefit Russia at a time when its coal exports to Europe are being phased out over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>China has refrained from criticizing Russia's invasion, and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and propaganda agencies have echoed many of Russia's recent criticisms of the United States and its allies. But China has also said that it would continue "normal trade" with Russia and has been wary of actively helping Russia circumvent Western sanctions.</p> <p>Three weeks ago, the European Union approved a ban on Russian coal, phasing in the measure over four months. The bloc imports about half of its coal from Russia, trade worth four billion euros a year.</p> <p>China's coal imports from Russia reached nearly seven billion euros last year and fall into an unusual category. China's imports of Russian coal doubled in the second half of last year, when China had a temporary coal shortage. China rapidly expanded its state-owned coal mines late last year and early this year to resolve the shortage.</p> <p>So a big question in global coal markets has been whether China will decide that its imports late last year represent "normal trade," or whether China's imports of Russian coal will recede to previous levels.</p> <p>Chinese customs data for the first three months of this year show that China's coal imports from Russia did fall back considerably from their peaks last autumn. But the tonnage of imports is still a little higher than a year ago.</p> <p>Alex Turnbull, a commodities analyst at Keshik Capital, a fund manager in Singapore, said that Chinese coal importers have encountered difficulties in recent weeks in finding ship owners willing to let their vessels be used to carry Russian coal. But a new cross-border rail line is scheduled to open as soon as next month and could expand China's ability to buy Russian coal.</p> <p>Russia is now China's second-largest source of imported coal, after Indonesia. China halted purchases of Australian coal 17 months ago after Australia, previously the second-largest supplier to China after Indonesia, called for an international investigation into how Covid-19 began spreading in Wuhan in late 2019.</p> <p>Many power plants in southern China's Guangdong Province are essentially locked into buying Indonesian coal because they were designed for maximum efficiency with Indonesia's grades of coal, Mr. Turnbull said. The price of coal makes a difference for power plants farther north, which choose from among a wider range of suppliers inside China and overseas.</p> <p>China currently collects a tariff of 3 to 6 percent on imported coal, depending on the quality of the coal. Canceling the tariff will make imported coal cheaper and more competitive with coal mined in China.</p> <p>The Customs Tariff Commission of China's cabinet said in a brief statement that it was suspending the tariff to improve China's energy security.</p> <p>The tariff suspension will eliminate the tariff from Sunday until March 31 next year, when it will be reconsidered.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 US: Russia still faces logistical challenges
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/28/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#russian-forces-still-face-logistical-challenges-in-their-offensive-a-pentagon-official-says
GIST	<p>Russian forces are making “slow and uneven” progress in fierce fighting in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, but are still struggling to overcome the same supply line problems that hampered their initial offensive, a senior Pentagon official said on Thursday.</p> <p>Russian and Ukrainian forces are engaged in heated combat in this latest phase of the war, with both sides seizing a village or two, then losing control, then regaining it in a seesaw campaign, the Pentagon official said. Russian troops have made “incremental” progress but nowhere near enough to seize an overall advantage, the official said.</p> <p>Wary of running too far ahead of their supply lines — as they did in the initial weeks of a failed attempt to seize Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital — Russian troops are advancing cautiously in this current phase, able to sustain only several kilometers of progress each day, the Pentagon official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss operational details.</p> <p>“The Russians haven’t overcome all their logistics problems,” the official said, citing slow going on the shipment of food, fuel, weapons and ammunition, despite having much shorter supply lines now than they did during the war’s first several weeks, in Ukraine’s north. Moscow now has 92 battalion groups fighting in eastern and southern Ukraine — up from 85 a week ago, but still well below the 125 they had in the first phase of the war, the Pentagon official said. Each battalion group has about 700 to 1,000 troops.</p> <p>Just over 20 additional battalions remain in Russia in various states of combat readiness, resupplying and rearming in a patchwork of units that were badly damaged by the earlier fighting, the official said. The remainder of the original 125 battalions are most likely destroyed, and American and British officials estimate that more than 15,000 Russian soldiers have died in the war since it began in late February.</p> <p>Fighting in the flat, wide-open plains of the Donbas would seem to play to Russia’s numerical and technological advantages, as well as its closer proximity to fuel, ammunition and other supply hubs just across the border in Russia.</p> <p>But there is a great equalizer looming: mud. Spring rains and warmer temperatures are thawing the winter’s frozen terrain, forcing Russian tanks, trucks and armored vehicles to rely even more heavily on paved roads — which make them more vulnerable to the guerrilla-style attacks that swarming bands of Ukrainian soldiers employed effectively in battles for Kyiv and other northern cities.</p> <p>“We would expect some of their progress to be slowed, frankly, by mud,” the Pentagon official said of Russian troops.</p> <p>As the battle rages in the Donbas, more and more Ukrainian soldiers are being trained in crash courses outside the country on the howitzers, armored personnel carriers and artillery-killing radar that are flowing into the country from the United States and other Western allies.</p> <p>For example, the first group of 50 Ukrainian artillery experts have completed a six-day course on operating the howitzers being shipped into Ukraine from Poland and other neighboring countries. A second group of 50 Ukrainian artillery specialists just started training. Both groups will return to their units and, in turn, train their comrades.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 British troops join allied exercises Europe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/29/world/britain-troops-europe.html
GIST	The British military will send some 8,000 troops to Europe as part of a larger allied deployment to deter further Russian aggression, British officials said.

The British troops will be serving in the Joint Expeditionary Force, a British-led multinational group created in 2014 in response to Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine.

Tens of thousands of troops from Joint Expeditionary Force and NATO countries will participate in exercises between April and June, Britain's defense ministry said in a statement released on Friday. The deployment was reported earlier by The Guardian.

"These exercises will see our troops join forces with allies and partners across NATO and the Joint Expeditionary Force in a show of solidarity and strength in one of the largest shared deployments since the Cold War," Ben Wallace, the British defense secretary, said in the statement.

The exercise was long planned, and Britain's participation had been announced in February, but British officials said it had been expanded as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The joint force's deployment is temporary, but NATO allies are considering whether to expand the forces they deploy on a rotational basis to Poland and the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Those discussions are expected to continue at the NATO summit in Spain, scheduled to begin June 29.

Those NATO battle groups have roughly 1,500 soldiers each. Some NATO allies want to expand those forces to brigade size, which could make them around 3,000 troops each.

NATO has also been discussing ways to offer enhanced security support to Sweden and Finland should they seek membership in the alliance. While NATO is expected to offer membership quickly, it will take months for individual allies to ratify the agreement, leaving those countries without the alliance's security guarantees.

The joint-force deployment will focus in part on the security of the Baltic region, and it could offer a measure of reassurance to Finland and Sweden. Both participate in the force.

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HEADLINE	04/28 US: Russia intelligence in attack on editor
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/world/novaya-gazeta-editor-attack-russia.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing
GIST	<p>Russian intelligence was behind an April attack in Moscow that inflicted chemical burns on a Nobel Prize-winning Russian newspaper editor, American officials said Thursday.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russian intelligence operatives orchestrated the April 7 attack on Dmitri A. Muratov, the editor in chief of Novaya Gazeta, an independent newspaper critical of the Kremlin and the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Mr. Muratov was preparing to travel on a train from Moscow when red paint laced with acetone was thrown on his face, causing chemical burns to his eyes.</p> <p>The American intelligence assessment has been declassified and U.S. officials confirmed the information on Thursday. The assessment was earlier reported by The Washington Post.</p> <p>In 2021, Mr. Muratov shared the Nobel Peace Prize with a crusading Filipina journalist in recognition of "their courageous fight for freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace." Six of Novaya Gazeta's journalists have been killed.</p> <p>After Russia enacted a draconian censorship law in March that effectively criminalizes any reporting on the war that contradicts the Kremlin, Novaya Gazeta was one of the few independent Russian media outlets that decided to continue publication.</p>

	<p>But in late March, Novaya Gazeta said it would suspend operation until after the Ukraine war was over, after it was twice warned by the Russian government that it had violated the new law. The second warning came a day after a Russian journalist asked a question on Mr. Muratov's behalf in a group interview with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine.</p> <p>Less than two weeks later, while on a train that was preparing to leave Moscow for a city to the southeast, Samara, Mr. Muratov was attacked. On April 12, Novaya Gazeta resumed publication briefly to post an investigation into the attack. That investigation identified the attacker and linked him to a group that denied it had conducted the assault.</p> <p>The U.S. intelligence work concluding that the assailant was working for Russian spy services was independent of the Novaya Gazeta investigation and drew from different sources, said a person briefed on the matter. U.S. officials, in keeping with standard practice, declined to discuss the sources American intelligence agencies used to draw the conclusion.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 Ukraine: 10 Russian soldiers in atrocities
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/29/world/europe/ukraine-singles-out-russian-soldiers-for-atrocities-in-bucha.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing
GIST	<p>KYIV — The Ukrainian authorities have published the names and photos of 10 Russian soldiers whom they accuse of kidnapping and torturing unarmed civilians in the town of Bucha, the most detailed accusation yet against Russian forces in Ukraine.</p> <p>Bucha, a suburb north of Kyiv, was the site of some of the war's worst atrocities discovered so far. The bodies of hundreds of civilians were found there after Russian troops pulled out of the area in late March. Many victims had been shot in the back of the head and others had been executed with their hands tied behind their backs. Ukrainian officials said that women had been raped and children killed.</p> <p>Ukraine's prosecutor general's office said in a statement on Thursday that the 10 named Russian soldiers took civilians hostage, "killed them with hunger and thirst, kept them on their knees with their hands tied and their eyes taped" and "humiliated and beat" them. The statement, which was posted on social media, included photos of the soldiers identified.</p> <p>"We know all the details about them and their actions," President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said in an overnight address. "And we will find everyone, just as we will find all the other Russian thugs who killed and tortured Ukrainians, who tormented our people, who destroyed houses and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine."</p> <p>Russian officials have denied that their troops committed any crimes in Bucha, calling the images and witness accounts fake. But dozens of witnesses, along with independent human rights investigators, have said the occupying Russian forces did just that.</p> <p>In a recent Human Rights Watch report, the advocacy group said that "Russian forces committed a litany of apparent war crimes during their occupation of Bucha" and there was "extensive evidence of summary executions, other unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, and torture, all of which would constitute war crimes and potential crimes against humanity."</p> <p>Ukrainian authorities identified Russia's 64th separate motorized infantry brigade as the unit responsible for some of these atrocities and said their involvement had been "established through investigative and coordinated work of prosecutors and police officers." The soldiers were all young and lower ranking and included four privates, four corporals and two sergeants, Ukrainian officials said.</p>

	<p>This case is the fruit of a sprawling investigation that will likely produce more detailed allegations in the coming days. For the past month, hundreds of Ukrainian lawyers and police officers have combed Bucha's ruined streets, interviewing witnesses and collecting forensic evidence from bodies and crime scenes.</p> <p>They have also gathered imagery of Russian soldiers from social media, closed circuit cameras and other sources to determine which Russian troops were where, and line that up with when atrocities were committed.</p> <p>"Ukraine's position is absolutely clear," Mr. Zelensky said. "Every Russian criminal must be and will be brought to justice. Whoever they are and wherever they hide, we will find them all and make them bear responsibility."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 GDP falls 1.4% as economy shrinks
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-economy-gdp-growth-q1-11651108351?mod=hp_lead_pos2&mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>The U.S. economy shrank in the first quarter as supply disruptions weighed on output, but underlying strength in consumer and business spending suggested growth will soon resume.</p> <p>The decline in U.S. gross domestic product at a 1.4% annual rate marked a sharp reversal from a 6.9% annual growth rate in the fourth quarter, the Commerce Department said Thursday. The first quarter was the weakest since spring 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic and related shutdowns drove the U.S. economy into a deep—albeit short—recession.</p> <p>The drop stemmed from a widening trade deficit. Imports to the U.S. surged and exports fell, dynamics reflecting pandemic-related supply-chain constraints. A slower pace of inventory investment by businesses in the first quarter—compared with a rapid buildup of inventories at the end of last year—also pushed growth down.</p> <p>In addition, fading government stimulus spending related to the pandemic weighed on GDP.</p> <p>Consumer spending, the economy's main driver, rose at a 2.7% annual rate in the first quarter, a slight acceleration from the end of last year. Businesses also poured more money into equipment and research and development, triggering a 9.2% rise in business spending.</p> <p>"The domestic economy remains remarkably resilient," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Grant Thornton. But, she said, "this is not a fairy-tale economy."</p> <p>The GDP report is unlikely to change the Federal Reserve's plans to raise interest rates rapidly this year, including by a half-percentage-point at a two-day meeting next week. One reason: The report is likely to add to concerns that the economy is growing too fast. Private demand in the first quarter grew at a 3.7% annual rate, well above the 1.8% growth rate the Fed expects for the overall economy over the long run. U.S. stocks rose sharply on Thursday, with technology stocks in the lead, after Facebook parent Meta Platforms Inc. posted solid earnings despite high U.S. inflation.</p> <p>Two years after the pandemic struck, the U.S. economy faces challenges, including supply disruptions related to the pandemic and Ukraine war, labor shortages and high inflation.</p> <p>Many economists think that the economy can withstand higher interest rates and return to modest growth in the second quarter and beyond, in part because consumers and businesses are continuing to spend.</p> <p>Consumers are spending more on services amid lower Covid-19 case totals and the lifting of remaining pandemic restrictions. Travel is a key example: U.S. hotel occupancy was at 65.8% for the week ended</p>

April 23, up from 49.6% at the end of January, according to STR, a global hospitality data and analytics company.

More people are also boarding planes following a slowdown in air travel amid the Omicron wave. About 2.1 million people passed through airport checkpoints in late April, up from 1.4 million three months earlier, according to the Transportation Security Administration.

George Lewis, co-owner of Brass Lantern Inn in Stowe, Vt., is seeing a surge in demand. Visits to his bed-and-breakfast on Maple Street are running strong, with rooms selling out some weekends this spring, a sharp shift from earlier in the pandemic when the inn relied on small-business aid to survive.

“People have called up: ‘Are you really sold out?’ ” Mr. Lewis said. “I’m like, ‘Yeah, yeah, we’re really sold out.’ ”

Still, Mr. Lewis is more concerned about business next year. For one, it isn’t clear where inflation will be, he said. Prices have already risen briskly for heating oil to warm rooms, as well as for the cheddar cheese Mr. Lewis uses in egg strata, a breakfast casserole he serves up on Saturdays.

Consumer spending is another wild card, he said.

“We don’t know what people’s pocketbooks can accommodate after this year,” he said. “Some people are spending...independent of what the cost is.”

Looking ahead, economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal estimate GDP rising 2.6% in the fourth quarter of 2022 from a year earlier, matching 2019 annual growth, but logging in well below 5.5% growth recorded last year.

[The labor market](#) is a key source of economic strength right now. Jobless claims—a proxy for layoffs—have been near historic lows and [fell last week to 180,000](#) as employers clung to employees amid a shortage of available workers. Businesses are hiring and ramping up wages, supporting consumer spending.

High inflation, though, is cutting into households’ purchasing power. Consumer prices rose 8.5% in March from a year earlier, a four-decade high.

Elevated inflation is wiping away pay gains for many workers: average hourly earnings were up 5.6% over the same period.

Fast-rising prices are also challenging many businesses.

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HEADLINE	04/28 India, Pakistan heat wave to worsen
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/world/asia/india-extreme-heat-wave.html
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — Across a wide swath of the Indian subcontinent, scorching temperatures have damaged harvests. People are suffering from heat stroke. And the lights are flickering in some cities amid surging demand for air-conditioning.</p> <p>Now, the heat wave that has been pummeling India and Pakistan for weeks is expected to intensify over the weekend. In some hard-hit areas, it may be weeks before the region's annual monsoon sweeps in to provide relief.</p> <p>Heat-related watches were in effect on Thursday afternoon for all but a few of India’s 28 states, encompassing hundreds of millions of people and most of the country’s major cities. An alert — one notch up in severity — was in effect for the northwestern state of Rajasthan on Thursday, and would come into effect for other central and western states starting Saturday.</p>

The heat wave poses health and logistical challenges for manual laborers, farmers, firefighters, power engineers, government officials and others, particularly in areas where air-conditioning is scarce.

“Our condition is not good,” said Sawadaram Bose, 48, a cumin and wheat farmer in Rajasthan, where temperatures climbed to 112 degrees Fahrenheit this week. He and his family are only leaving the house before 11 a.m. or after 5 p.m., he said, and never without a water bottle or head and face coverings.

The temperatures are well above normal.

The subcontinent’s scorching weather is a reminder of what lies in store for other countries in an era of climate change. Climate scientists say that heat waves around the world are growing [more frequent, more dangerous and lasting longer](#). They are certain that global warming has made heat waves worse because the baseline temperatures from which they begin are [higher than they were decades ago](#).

“Extreme heat is obviously one of the hallmarks of our changing climate,” said Clare Nullis, an official at the World Meteorological Organization, a United Nations agency that [certifies weather records](#) at the international level.

It is too early to say whether the current temperatures in India or Pakistan will lead to any new national-level weather records, she added.

In India, where forecasters said that March was the hottest month the country has witnessed in over a century, the National Weather Forecasting Center said this week that temperatures in some states were 10 degrees Fahrenheit or more above normal in some areas.

The heat-related watches in parts of southern and eastern India, where rain was in the forecast, were expected to end within a day or two, the authorities said. But in a diagonal band stretching from Rajasthan in the northwest to Andhra Pradesh in the southeast, the watches were expected to persist or be elevated into heat alerts through Monday.

The forecast looked similar in most of neighboring Pakistan, where government forecasters [said this week](#) that a high pressure system would likely keep temperatures above normal through Monday.

Pakistan’s Meteorological Department also [warned](#) that in regions dotted with glaciers, the heat could lead to so-called [outburst floods](#), in which water spills from glacial lakes into populated areas. In 2013, an outburst flood in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand led to flooding that destroyed villages and killed several thousand people.

In both countries, the forecasts cited only temperature, not [the heat index](#) — a measure that combines temperature and humidity and tends to give a more accurate portrait of what extreme weather feels like.

Fusaram Bishnoi, a doctor in Barmer, an area of Rajasthan that has recorded some of India’s highest temperatures this week, said he had seen a surge of patients arriving with heat-related illnesses in recent days. That includes not only heat stroke, he said, but also food-borne illnesses linked to the consumption of food that spoiled in the heat.

“We tell people not to venture out during the day and to drink more, and more water,” Dr. Bishnoi said.

‘Everything is ready to burn.’

The extreme heat poses a problem for agriculture, a primary source of income for hundreds of millions of people across the subcontinent. In India, wheat farmers have been saying for weeks that high temperatures were damaging their yields. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip garden closed a week early this spring because many bulbs had flowered and then died before an annual monthlong exhibition had run its course.

Mr. Bose, the farmer, who lives in the Barmer district of Rajasthan, said that about 15 to 20 percent of the local wheat crop, as well as half the cumin crop, had already been lost because of unseasonably hot

	<p>weather and changes in wind flow. It does not help, he added, that the current heat wave has made it harder to work outdoors.</p> <p>“No work during the day in the fields,” he said.</p> <p>The heat wave is also straining basic municipal services. In India, more than 10 states, including the one that includes the city of Mumbai, have faced power shortages in recent days. That is partly a function of the heat, but also of a national shortage of coal, a fuel that accounts for about three-quarters of the country’s power supply.</p> <p>In New Delhi this week, there has been a rash of landfill fires that officials said were caused by spontaneous combustion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India said on Wednesday that the extreme heat was raising the risk that more fires would occur in the capital, and beyond.</p> <p>Calls to fire departments in New Delhi typically rise at this time of year, but an increase in recent months — from 60 to 70 calls per day to more than 150 per day — has been larger than usual, said Atul Garg, the director of fire services in New Delhi.</p> <p>“Everything is ready to burn,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Lawsuit: SPD negligence 2020 BLM protests
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/father-of-child-pepper-sprayed-during-seattle-blm-protest-files-federal-civil-rights-lawsuit/
GIST	<p>The father of a child who was doused with pepper spray during the early days of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests downtown has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit alleging assault and negligence by the involved Seattle police officers.</p> <p>Their use of force sparked national outrage after video and photos showed volunteer medics and other protesters pouring water and milk on the screaming child’s face in an effort to relieve his suffering. Police accountability officials say the highly publicized incident generated nearly 13,000 complaints against the department.</p> <p>Following a three-month investigation, Seattle’s civilian-run Office of Police Accountability determined the boy’s injuries were “inadvertent” and that the incident was not an excessive use of force or a violation of Seattle Police Department policy. The officer was trying to direct a stream of pepper spray at another protester and struck the child instead, according to the OPA.</p> <p>The boy’s father, Armand Avery, alleges in a lawsuit filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court that he and his son — who was 7 years old at the time and is identified in the suit by the initials “A.J.” — “decided to participate in a peaceful rally and protest” near Westlake Mall with members of their family and church congregation on May 30, 2020. The demonstration came five days after the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd shocked the nation’s conscience and sent thousands of Black Lives Matter protesters into the streets.</p> <p>Vandalism and violence — including the torching of several police cars — resulted in Seattle officers resorting to force, including the use of tear gas, pepper spray and batons against protesters, most of whom were peaceful and not breaking laws. A federal judge later found the police uses of force likely violated the civil rights of thousands who had gathered to peacefully and legally protest police violence and brutality.</p> <p>Anthony Derrick, a spokesperson for City Attorney Ann Davison, said the office is unable to comment on pending litigation. Avery’s attorney, James Bible, did not immediately respond to a phone message seeking additional comment.</p>

According to the OPA investigation, the officer involved, a sergeant, had rushed to reinforce riot armor-clad officers stretched across Third Avenue near Westlake Plaza after police had pulled a man behind the police lines to arrest him for an earlier incident.

The crowd, while mostly nonviolent, jostled the officers, and a masked woman wearing a bike helmet is seen in body camera footage grabbing an officer's baton and shoving him. That's when the sergeant — who had a blast ball in one hand and a large canister of pepper spray in the other — unleashed a stream of the blue-dyed irritant at the woman.

Body camera footage showed the child and his father were right behind the woman in the bike helmet, and the internal investigation concluded that it was unlikely the sergeant could see the child, who was dwarfed by the jostling adults around him. The boy got a dose of the powerful irritant as the woman ducked and scrambled away.

"Videos and pictures were taken of the aftermath of A.J. being sprayed with [Oleoresin Capsicum] spray," a powerful irritant that causes a burning sensation, pain and temporary blindness, the lawsuit says. "In the videos, A.J. can be seen crying out in pain and shaking."

The lawsuit alleges the child was in agony much of that evening and was treated at a hospital for chemical burns.

The lawsuit also alleges the city and its officers violated the law against discrimination because Avery and his son are Black and the protest "was intended to address disproportionate excessive force used unjustly against African Americans and other people of color."

"The use of noxious gases against individuals exercising their constitutional right to speak out about issues of inequity in support of members of a protected class constitutes a violation of the Washington State Law Against Discrimination," the lawsuit claims.

The lawsuit also alleges outrage, negligence and violations of the father and son's Fourth Amendment protections against illegal seizure.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Schools return to masks or online classes
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/covid-cases-rise-schools-some-return-mask-requirements-or-online-learning/CRYQ6EYOD5FHLDC2TUADSQP2PA/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — COVID cases are rising in many Western Washington schools, making parents and teachers more vigilant and leading a couple of schools to bring back mask requirements or move to remote learning.</p> <p>"At this point, my kids wear masks, we wash our hands and we're just trying to make it to June," said Kathryn Loeffler, who has two children in South Shore PreK-8 in Seattle.</p> <p>The Seattle Public Schools COVID dashboard showed a substantial jump in cases last week, 517 more than the week before.</p> <p>Masks are no longer mandatory districtwide, though school officials say there have been a handful of individual classrooms where masks have been required because of an exposure.</p> <p>Bremerton High School on Thursday switched to two days of online learning because of a staff shortage. Teachers have been out sick, including with COVID.</p> <p>Dimmitt Middle School in the Renton district had enough cases that masks are required again.</p>

	<p>“This is the hardest year on record. We thought online learning was hard. We weren’t really prepared for the difficulties of this year,” said Julianna Dauble, a teacher who serves as president of the Renton Education Association.</p> <p>Dauble said staff shortages mean teachers continue to lose planning periods to cover for colleagues.</p> <p>“It’s gotten better since January and February, but day-to-day it’s still really a struggle in any of our buildings,” she said.</p> <p>She said both students and teachers are also suffering the mental health effects of the pandemic.</p> <p>“We have quite a number of teachers who are going on leave for PTSD, mental health issues, we have quite a number of teachers not coming back, they’re resigning,” Dauble said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 SPD chief: soaring crime, staffing crisis
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/as-cops-leave-and-crime-rate-rises-seattle-police-chief-diaz-eyes-plan-to-turn-the-tide
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — From a staggering staffing crisis to soaring crime rates, the Seattle Police Department is in a dire situation.</p> <p>Interim Chief Adrian Diaz was candid when he spoke to KOMO News Thursday about how his officers are struggling to deal with 911 calls. But he said he also has a new plan he hopes will retain officers over the long term.</p> <p>“I am concerned as the crime rate goes up,” said Diaz, who didn't mince words during the interview. “We’re also augmenting 99.7 percent of our shifts (and) that gets concerning because officers are getting tired.”</p> <p>The department is still losing more officers than it's hiring, and now the agency is struggling to keep up with crime in the city and its 911 calls.</p> <p>“Right now, when you look at Priority 3 calls, they are approaching an hour,” he said.</p> <p>Since January of 2020, the police department lost 332 officers — or 26 percent of its force. Department officials said there are about 940 deployable officers.</p> <p>The department is down 30 officers since the start of the year since 43 of them have left with only 13 hired as replacements.</p> <p>It’s clear to the chief that the situation is not sustainable.</p> <p>“When you talk to a victim that has been burglarized, you do want an officer to be able to respond and get evidence and all those things,” Diaz said. “That person wants to feel a sense of security and accountability.”</p> <p>The Seattle City Council this week discussed incentives to recruit and retain new officers, and the chief hopes it’s a more urgent priority.</p> <p>The proposed ordinance would give \$650,000 to help the department attract new officers.</p> <p>“When I look at staffing, I want to make sure our officers feel valued and respected,” Diaz said. “When you have Tacoma and all these other agencies that are doing the same thing, as far as incentives and have take-home cars and other things, we want to make sure we’re competitive as well.”</p>

Another plan Diaz hopes will help invest and retain officers in the long term is a Seattle-specific police academy program he is planning to launch this summer called Before the Badge.

“No one in the country is doing this right now,” he said.

The police chief did not mince words during the interview with KOMO News.

During the 45- day training, officers meet with community members, elected leaders and prosecutors to learn about the criminal justice system.

He said the training is geared at teaching officers how to connect with community members, earn their trust and learn what’s expected as police officers for Seattle.

“It’s preparing officers to deal with the traumas that they’re going to experience out on the streets,” Diaz said. “We just trying to make sure we give the skill sets to our officers to understand and deal with many of the calls to service that we encounter.”

Some of the pressing issues officers will now have to deal with include a rising crime rate directly connected to homeless encampments and brazen repeat offenders who officers are trying to crack down on with the assistance of the city attorney’s office.

“But we do need to make sure we are holding people accountable because there are a huge number of prolific offenders that continue to just prey on our community,” Diaz said.

With all the obstacles, Chief Diaz said his officers will keep doing the work with what they have, but they can't do it alone.

KOMO News asked the chief how he convinces someone to become a Seattle police officer.

“I try to tell people, 'Look, if you want to be something bigger than you, this is what that agency is able to provide,’” Diaz said.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Officials: new variant more transmissible
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/state-health-leaders-warn-new-covid-variant-is-more-transmissible-than-past-variants
GIST	<p>State virologists are warning the newest COVID-19 variant in Washington is even more transmissible than previous variants. There’s still a lot researchers still don’t know about the new BA.2.12.1 subvariant.</p> <p>Take a walk near downtown Seattle and people have mixed reaction to hearing about the new, highly transmissible omicron subvariant.</p> <p>For the first time, the state department of health’s latest variant report shows BA.2.12.1 accounts for about 5-percent of sequenced cases.</p> <p>The U.W. Virology lab does its own sequencing for King County.</p> <p>“It’s just another reminder that although sometimes it feels like it COVID is not done with us yet,” said Dr. Pavitra Roychoudhury with the UW Medicine Virology Lab.</p> <p>She warns it’s proving to be even more transmissible than previous variants and says scientists are also trying to figure out how effective vaccines are against it.</p>

"We'll have to wait to get that kind of data," Roychoudhury said. "For example, we know that prior infection with BA.1 does confer some amount of protection towards BA.2 so that kind of data will come slowly for this particular subvariant."

Officials are hoping some of the immunity gained from the Omicron wave back in January, and the protection from the vaccine will prevent another big spike in cases.

"We're not seeing that same level of surge," Roychoudhury said. "With that being said, we are seeing a rise in cases so we're definitely watching and waiting and hoping that it's not as bad."

She added it's still too soon to know how severe COVID-19 symptoms may be with this new subvariant, or how it might impact hospitals. They expect to have a lot more data soon as they continue their research.

The U.W. Virology Lab dashboard shows there have been no cases of this new subvariant found in King County as of the most recent reporting period two weeks ago.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Court rejects recall effort on Governor
SOURCE	https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/state/washington/article260859342.html
GIST	<p>The Washington Supreme Court on Thursday unanimously rejected an effort to recall Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The justices upheld a Thurston County Superior Court decision that the charges made against Inslee did not provide factually or legally sufficient grounds to support a recall campaign.</p> <p>The recall petition was brought by a citizen group called Washingtonians to Recall Inslee. It alleged that the governor's orders limiting activities and gatherings during the pandemic interfered with their rights.</p> <p>For example, the petition argued, Inslee violated the separation of powers by banning landlords from suing tenants for overdue rent; violated constitutional rights of assembly and to petition the government for redress of grievances by prohibiting public agencies from holding in-person meetings; and violated the right to assemble by limiting the size of in-person gatherings.</p> <p>The court, however, found that Inslee's proclamations were well within his emergency powers.</p> <p>"Governor Inslee has used his discretion to navigate this pandemic, making difficult decisions in an effort to balance the health and safety of Washingtonians with their individual liberties," Justice Debra Stephens wrote for the court. "While reasonable minds may disagree with the governor's discretionary decisions, such disagreement is insufficient to support a recall."</p> <p>The recall backers did not explain how a temporary limitation on the ability of landlords to sue their tenants infringed on the power of the courts; there were adequate alternative means, such as telephonic or online meetings, to ensure public access to government; and restrictions on gatherings were not directed at suppressing speech but "tailored to serve a substantial government interest," the justices said.</p> <p>Olympia resident C Davis, who brought the appeal of the superior court ruling last June, told The Associated Press on Thursday he had not yet read the Supreme Court opinion but the result was "not too much of a surprise."</p> <p>Washingtonians to Recall Inslee is ready to support another recall effort, by a different proponent, that will make three new charges against the governor, Davis said.</p> <p>Washington faced one of the first known outbreaks of COVID-19 and was among the first states to implement sweeping restrictions in the early days of the pandemic. It has since eased or rescinded many</p>

	restrictions, such as bans on large gatherings and vaccination requirements for such gatherings, while others, such as a mask requirement for healthcare settings, long-term care facilities and jails, remain in effect.
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HEADLINE	04/28 JBLM report of active shooter false alarm
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/military/article260857797.html
GIST	<p>A report of an active shooter Thursday morning at Joint Base Lewis-McChord was actually a “miscommunication” during a training exercise for active shooter situations, according to a base spokesperson.</p> <p>Military police responded about 10 a.m. for a report of an active shooter near Lewis North, an area of the base northwest of Interstate 5 near American Lake. Police went to that area and found no evidence of an active shooter.</p> <p>Base spokesperson Gary Dangerfield said someone had overhead “active shooter, active shooter,” while a unit was conducting training and called 911.</p> <p>“Our military police were responding to a call and doing what they needed to do to secure the area and keep us all safe,” Dangerfield said.</p> <p>Dangerfield apologized for the false alarm. JBLM was not put on an official lockdown, but the report caused some at the base to take cover.</p> <p>Bruce Wong, 69, said his younger sister, who works as a special education teacher at JBLM, texted him at about 10:30 a.m., telling him she’d heard the whole base was locked down and that she was hiding under her desk.</p> <p>“I started texting my family to make sure that they knew,” Wong said. “We had a whole set of text messages between our brothers and her: ‘stay under the desk, grab something just in case, barricade the door.’”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 States sue USPS over gas-powered fleet
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Groups-that-want-to-electrify-USPS-fleet-file-17133337.php
GIST	<p>California and 15 states that want the U.S. Postal Service to electrify its mail delivery vehicles are suing to halt purchases of thousands of gas-powered trucks as the agency modernizes its delivery fleet.</p> <p>Three separate lawsuits, filed Thursday by the states and environmental groups in New York and California, ask judges to order a more thorough environmental review before the Postal Service moves forward with the next-generation delivery vehicle program.</p> <p>Plaintiffs contend that purchases of fossil fuel-powered delivery vehicles will cause environmental harm for decades to come. The lawsuits could further delay the Postal Service’s efforts to replace the ubiquitous delivery trucks that went into service between 1987 and 1994.</p> <p>“Louis DeJoy’s gas-guzzling fleet guarantees decades of pollution with every postcard and package,” said Scott Hochberg, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, referring to the postmaster general.</p> <p>Attorneys general from 16 states — 14 of which have Democratic governors — sued in San Francisco. A separate lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, CleanAirNow KC and Sierra Club was filed in the same venue. Another was filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council and United Auto Workers in New York.</p>

All three of them target the environmental review underpinning the Postal Service's planned purchase of up to 165,000 next-generation delivery vehicles over the next decade.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said it's key to stop the process before it's too late.

"Once this purchase goes through, we'll be stuck with more than 100,000 new gas-guzzling vehicles on neighborhood streets, serving homes across our state and across the country, for the next 30 years. There won't be a reset button," he said.

The Postal Service defended the process it followed under DeJoy, a wealthy former logistics executive and Republican donor who was appointed by a board of governors controlled by then-President Donald Trump.

"The Postal Service conducted a robust and thorough review and fully complied with all of our obligations under (the National Environmental Policy Act)," spokesperson Kim Frum said Thursday in an email.

The Postal Service contract calls for 10% of the new vehicles to be electric but the Postal Service contends more electric vehicles can be purchased based on financial outlook and strategic considerations.

The percentage of battery-electric vehicles was doubled — to 20% — in the initial \$2.98 billion order for 50,000 vehicles.

Environmental advocates contend the Postal Service's environmental review was inadequate and flawed, and that the contract represented a missed opportunity to electrify the fleet and reduce emissions.

The review process "was so rickety and riddled with error that it failed to meet the basic standards of the National Environmental Policy Act," said Adrian Martinez, senior attorney on Earthjustice's Right to Zero campaign.

New York Attorney General Letitia James said the Postal Service used "fatally flawed decision-making" that led to an outcome that was "fiscally and environmentally irresponsible." New York is among the plaintiffs.

If the parties can't agree on a settlement, the lawsuit could drag on for months, possibly into next year, if there are appeals, said University of Richmond School of Law professor Carl Tobias.

The new gasoline-powered vehicles would get 14.7 miles per gallon (23.7 kilometers per gallon) without air conditioning, compared to 8.4 mpg (13.5 kpg) for the older vehicles, the Postal Service said.

All told, the Postal Service's fleet includes 190,000 local delivery vehicles. More than 141,000 of those are the old models that lack safety features like air bags, anti-lock brakes and backup cameras.

The new vehicles are taller to make it easier for postal carriers to grab packages and parcels that make up a greater share of volume. They also have improved ergonomics and climate control.

The states that sued are California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District in California, District of Columbia and city of New York joined that lawsuit, as well.

HEADLINE	04/28 Sound Transit eases fare enforcement
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/sound-transit-eases-fare-enforcement-amid-equity-concerns/
GIST	<p>Sound Transit’s board of directors voted Thursday to overhaul its fare enforcement practices, with the goal of creating a system that’s less punitive, more educational and increasingly mindful of racial disparities.</p> <p>The vote, years in the making, also comes as the transit agency has seen its fare collections bottom out over the past two years as ridership during the pandemic has plummeted. Sound Transit staff also estimated in January that up to 42% of riders were boarding without tapping their ORCA cards.</p> <p>The balancing act between revenue and equity considerations created tension among board members and outside advocates over concerns that the new policies would be too lenient or too stringent.</p> <p>Despite these worries, the board elected to move forward with a policy that takes enforcement out of the hands of security, increases the number of warnings to riders and makes it less likely that those who were found to have not paid their fare will end up in civil court.</p> <p>The new policies also remove the possibility of suspension from the system for nonpayment and provide riders with an appeals process for enforcement action taken against them.</p> <p>“I’m glad that we have strong progressive policies before us today,” said board member and King County Councilmember Joe McDermott, “and one that is very responsive to the conversation that began some four years ago. As this policy was introduced, it responsibly responds to the disparity and enforcement problems we identified in our previous policy and practice.”</p> <p>The board also had been scheduled to vote Thursday to extend its fare ambassador program — which took the place of security guards carrying out enforcement — and to revise the reduced-fare cost from \$1.50 down to \$1, but tabled both for time. The board will revisit them next month.</p> <p>The new policies will take effect Sept. 17. Riders who have not paid their fare will receive two warnings before facing a financial penalty, up from the current policy of one. On the third and fourth violations, riders will be fined \$50, then \$75. The fines are administrative, rather than civil, and can be satisfied through payment or some alternative path, such as signing up for the reduced fare program if the rider qualifies. Only on the fifth violation will a rider face a \$124 civil infraction — which could lead to a misdemeanor if left unpaid. The current policy graduates to a civil fine after the first warning.</p> <p>The revisions to Sound Transit’s fare enforcement come three years after a dive into the agency’s data showed that Black riders were more than twice as likely to be cited for nonpayment and four times as likely to have their cases end up as misdemeanors.</p> <p>For transit advocates, the top priority was to remove the enforcement process from the criminal justice system, which can quickly snowball.</p> <p>“Steep penalties and a tour through the courts can ruin people’s lives,” said Wes Mills, a member of the Transit Riders Union, during public comment.</p> <p>Although the new policies make it less likely an individual will have their case referred to district court, it maintains that avenue as a possibility.</p> <p>McDermott proposed an amendment that would have eliminated the possibility of a civil infraction, replacing it with a \$100 administrative fine. But the proposal failed, 7-9. However, his amendment to bar riders from being sent to collections for nonpayment of fines did pass.</p> <p>On the other side, some raised concerns that the new policies would serve as de facto endorsement of riding without paying. CEO Peter Rogoff had already raised that with board members, and the January estimate of 42% of riders boarding light rail without paying underscores the problem.</p>

Rogoff's concern coincides with an overall dip in fare revenue projections through 2046, from \$9.5 billion in 2019 to, on the low end, \$6.1 billion now. Six percent of Sound Transit's overall budget is tied to fare collections. The board previously set a goal of recouping 40% of its operating budget through fare collection, but that figure was just 5% in 2021.

"It's not about the \$3.50. It's about ensuring that riders have to pay for the system they're using as we promised the voters when we passed Sound Transit," said board member and Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin.

Board member and King County Councilmember Dave Upthegrove said he sought to distinguish between those who could not pay and those who chose not to, referring to the latter as cheaters.

"The benefits narrowly outweigh the costs," he said in voting in favor.

Questions remain about implementation. The fare ambassador program, which began as a pilot last August, is intended to provide riders with more education and to make fare collection feel less like a police action. But staffing shortages have constrained the program; Sound Transit staff estimated earlier this month that an average rider will go 23 trips before encountering a fare ambassador.

Another issue is how Sound Transit will track warnings to riders who did not pay. In recent years, three-quarters of riders have provided no or insufficient identification when approached by a fare enforcement officer, raising the question of how the agency will know who's been warned already.

Sound Transit also wants to sign up 80% of riders who are eligible for reduced fare. The current estimate is that just 40% are signed up.

When compared to several other cities, Sound Transit's new policies offer more warnings and less expensive fines. Portland and Denver each only give one warning before fining riders for nonpayment. Houston and Dallas give fare enforcement officers discretion when they choose to offer a warning and when to write a fine.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Ukraine attacks bring war home to Russians
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/28/ukrainian-attacks-bring-war-home-russia-fraying-civilian-nerve/
GIST	<p>RIGA, Latvia — The Kremlin has sought to minimize discussion of Russian war losses inside Ukraine. But apparent Ukrainian attacks on Russian soil in the past week highlight how the conflict has spilled across the border, unsettling residents of regions near the border and threatening to upend President Vladimir Putin's effort to insulate his citizens from the fighting he started.</p> <p>In the wake of the shellings and strikes, local authorities are sounding alarms — as well as calling for revenge and in some cases evacuations — as they contend with the growing peril.</p> <p>The attacks, which Ukrainian leaders have neither confirmed nor denied but which one senior adviser winkingly described as “karma” on Wednesday, suggest that Kyiv is increasingly able to reach into Russian territory as the war continues. Empowered by NATO's military aid, Ukrainian troops are hitting infrastructure, military targets and, Russian authorities say, at least some villages. Russian citizens are now waking to the same explosions that Ukrainians have faced for more than two months, making the conflict far more immediate and dangerous.</p> <p>At least 11 hits appear to have occurred since the fighting began Feb. 24, most of them since late last week. Most seem to have involved shelling or triggered Russian antiaircraft weaponry. A handful were suspicious explosions at Russian military facilities near the border.</p>

They have drawn Russian fury.

“The Anglo-Saxons publicly recommend that Ukraine move hostilities onto Russian territory. And supply it with the means to implement this plan,” Margarita Simonyan, editor of the state-run Russia Today news outlet, [tweeted](#) Thursday. “What choice are you giving us, idiots? Complete destruction of the remaining Ukraine? Nuclear strike?”

In recent days, residents of the most vulnerable areas have posted videos of apparent explosions and Russian anti-aircraft defense rockets streaking into the nighttime sky.

“I think this is coming here,” one anxious witness can be heard saying, along with an expletive, in a video showing intense flames and a massive plume of thick smoke billowing over the city of Belgorod early Wednesday.

In another video filmed several hours later, what is described as a Russian humanitarian convoy comes under fire as it speeds across open fields in the afternoon sun.

“We are riding here, they are shelling us, we are trying to escape. God have mercy! This is scary,” Alena Berezovskaya, a pro-Kremlin activist and journalist, said in the clip that the state-run RIA Novosti outlet posted Thursday.

Berezovskaya sits in what looks like a military truck. Booms can be heard around her. The convoy was said to have come under attack in Zhuravlyovka, less than a mile into Russia, after delivering supplies to Russian-held territory near Ukraine’s second largest city of Kharkiv.

She nervously adjusts her green helmet as the rolling Russian countryside streaks by her window, the fields bearing the first green blush of spring.

“It’s scary on a human level, of course, but everything is in the hands of God,” she said.

With large portions of Russian border territory feeling a sense of vulnerability, local leaders have had little choice but to acknowledge what is happening to their residents and try to protect them. Early this month, authorities declared the second-highest terrorist threat level in regions closest to Ukraine. They advised residents to avoid gathering in large crowds.

Belgorod’s governor, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said Wednesday that he was woken up at 3:35 a.m. that day “from a loud noise, like an explosion.”

The governor of neighboring Kursk, Roman Starovoi, explained the loud banging sounds Kursk residents had heard as the work of Russian air defense equipment. On Monday, two Turkish-made Bayraktar drones were shot down over the region, RIA Novosti reported, raising the possibility of serious danger for residents since the drones can be equipped with powerful weaponry.

Some expect that in the next stage of the war, attacks could be a near-daily occurrence.

“We assume that ... some kind of missiles or Bayraktars will now be flying in and strike almost every day, and we will see many more such reports,” said Ruslan Leviev, founder of the Conflict Intelligence Team, an independent analytical group that uses open-source data to track military activities.

Few Ukrainians offer any sympathy, with an adviser to President Volodymyr Zelensky saying Russians should not be surprised to find themselves targeted.

“Sooner or later the debts will have to be repaid,” Mykhailo Podolyak wrote in Russian in a Telegram post that attributed the shellings, explosions and unexplained fires to the work of “divine intervention” after the relentless assault of Mariupol during the week leading up to Orthodox Easter.

Ukraine's Western backers support strikes on military sites inside Russian territory.

The country should "do whatever is necessary to defend against Russian aggression," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a congressional panel on Wednesday. It would be "legitimate under international law" for Ukraine to attack "the logistics structure of the Russian army," British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace told the BBC on Thursday.

Many NATO nations initially were cautious about providing weaponry that could reach deep into Russia. Those cautions have ebbed somewhat. But even without directly providing long-range equipment, the alliance can still backfill Ukraine's stocks and enable it to take greater overall risks.

Given Russians' broad support for the war, incursions on Russian soil are likely to provoke public calls for escalation, rather than the opposite, said Tatiana Stanovaya, founder of France-based political analysis firm R. Politik.

"Russian society is not ready for peace. Russian society expects that Ukraine will be defeated," she said. "Everything that comes from Ukraine, like attacks on Russian territory, only fuels such sentiments."

Yet such strikes, she added, also challenge the Kremlin's domestic narrative that what is happening in Ukraine is a "special operation" — quick and fast — and not a war.

Attacks are more likely intended as messages to Russian leaders rather than efforts to turn the broader public against the fighting, said Andrei Kolesnikov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"People may perceive it as warning shots. But so far, warning shots are more for the Kremlin," he said. "Ukraine's substantial military capabilities are becoming evident, and it is even possible that the nature of the war in the border regions will change."

Zhuravlyovka, the village where the humanitarian convoy was targeted Wednesday, has faced repeated incidents. At least two residents were injured during nighttime shelling on Monday, according to Gladkov, who wrote on the social network VKontakte that he wanted to evacuate the area "for a safer place" but that some residents were refusing.

Village leader Anzhelika Samoilova recounted how she and other residents, many of them elderly, had spent the night in a basement for safety.

"These are horrific emotions. No one expected this. No one was prepared for this. When I saw this with my own eyes, I was shocked," Samoilova said in a video posted to the governor's VKontakte profile that showed a modest home with part of its roof blown away. "It was scary to come outside."

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HEADLINE	04/28 San Juan Islands ferry damaged
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/loose-anchor-damages-ferry-in-san-juan-islands/
GIST	<p>Ferry service in the San Juan Islands is currently severely reduced, after one of the four boats that travels to and from Anacortes sustained damage near the Lopez Island dock Wednesday evening.</p> <p>Exactly what happened is still under investigation, but at around 4:30 p.m., the anchor on the Yakima ferry came loose, dropping several feet down the side of the boat and swinging in place. The loose steel anchor, which weighs many hundreds of pounds, bent metal on the ferry and punctured the ship's hull above the waterline, said Ian Sterling, spokesperson for Washington State Ferries. The dock on Lopez Island also "has some pretty good damage," said Sterling.</p> <p>No injuries were reported.</p>

How the anchor came loose is unclear, said Sterling. It's possible a hard landing by the Yakima jiggered it free, but it's also possible the damage to the dock was only caused after the anchor dropped. Sterling noted that the Yakima has a history with this dock: In December it made a hard landing in the same place.

"It's certainly not ideal and it's a little bit of a mystery that we're going to solve," Sterling said.

John Hennen was traveling to Friday Harbor, on San Juan Island, Wednesday night. As the ferry was making its midway stop on Lopez Island, Hennen heard a "wham" and the whole boat lurched forward.

"There was no weather, there was no high winds, there was no particular reason for that to happen," he said. Hennen then peered over the side of the boat, between the ferry and the bumpers leading into the dock, and saw a sheet of metal near the hull that looked like it had been rolled up.

"It looked to me like the ship probably wasn't going to sink or anything but there were people making jokes about the Titanic," he said.

At around 6 p.m., all passengers were told to exit the ferry. Hennen and the other passengers waited on shore until another ferry came to pick them up. Hennen arrived in Friday Harbor by around 8:30 p.m.

So far, 18 daily sailings in the San Juans have been canceled as a result of the ferry's damage. Sterling couldn't say when those runs might return. The Coast Guard will need to examine the ferry and the dock, he said. In the meantime, Washington State Ferries is looking at all options, including bringing in another ferry from another route. New reservations for the San Juan ferries have been suspended and any fees for not showing up to a previously reserved spot in line will be waived.

"It's a ballet dance of how you move things around," he said. "The San Juans being true islands we need to get some kind of service up there."

Service across the ferry system has struggled to stay on pace amid staffing shortages and vessel maintenance. The routes between Edmonds and Kingston, Seattle and Bremerton and Vashon, Southworth and Fauntleroy have consistently seen service reduced due to crewing issues.

Other routes, such as the one between Seattle and Bainbridge, have seen chronic delays.

The state Legislature allocated around \$1.5 billion to the ferry system, most of which will go toward building four new hybrid-electric boats. Of the total, \$350 million will go toward operating expenses.

The ferry system recently announced a partnership with the Seattle Maritime Academy to recruit more workers to the system, especially those who can work in the engine room.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Seattle schools propose new start times
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/ongoing-transportation-issues-prompt-seattle-schools-to-propose-new-start-times/
GIST	<p>Seattle Public Schools officials are proposing three different start times for schools next school year in an effort to ease an ongoing transportation issue caused by a nationwide bus driver shortage.</p> <p>Under the proposal, which would take effect this fall, most elementary and high school students would start nearly a half-hour earlier while most middle school students and those attending K-8 schools would fall under later start times.</p> <p>But the proposed changes are prompting concerns from Seattle families worried about adjustments needed to accommodate new start times, like child care and after-school programs, as well as safety concerns for young students waiting for buses in the dark during winter.</p>

The board is expected to vote on the changes May 18.

“We are bringing this forward because we have a problem with our ability to be able to offer consistent and predictable transportation to our families,” Ashley Davies, executive director of operations, said during an [April 21 committee meeting](#).

Davies, who said officials are hearing from families nearly daily about unreliable transportation, said the district’s approach is from a “systems perspective” to mitigate and navigate challenges.

The district cut [142 bus routes in October](#) because of driver shortages. [Thousands of families](#) had to scramble to get children to school and in some cases, students were late for class because the shortages caused bus delays.

While some routes were brought back, there are still nearly 50 routes that aren’t running and won’t be restored by the end of the school year, according to district officials.

About 20% (10,781 students) of Seattle students are eligible for transportation services, according to district spokesperson Tim Robinson.

The long-running issue has meant some eligible families haven’t been able to access bus services, Davies said, and if that doesn’t change, the district could lose state funding for transportation. If Seattle doesn’t return to three start times, about 50 routes will need to be slashed or there will continue to be bus delays of up to two hours.

Changing start times will allow Seattle Schools to cut 70 of its 364 buses and will save the district at least \$5 million, Davies said. Currently, the district spends [\\$3,306 per student on transportation](#), higher than any other district in the state and more than three times the national average.

However, the savings won’t make a huge dent in the district’s more than \$1 billion budget, said Vivian van Gelder, advocacy and policy manager for Southeast Seattle Education Coalition.

First Student has been a longtime transportation provider with the district, which currently has a \$40 million contract with the bus company. But [in February, Seattle abruptly canceled](#) First Student’s bid to renew a contract one week after a state investigation revealed [more than 600 safety violations](#) by the company.

In the 2017-18 school year, Seattle changed its bell schedule from three start times to two so teens could come to school later — as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. At the time board members [called the vote a historic moment](#) that would lead to a trend of later start times for high school students, which has been backed by sleep scientists and teachers.

But the schedule changes in the 2017-18 school year dramatically worsened existing transportation issues. The incidents when buses were delayed or didn’t show up [increased by 833% over two years](#). Having two start times instead of three gave bus drivers less time to finish their routes, and they could only manage one route without delaying the next. The result: More drivers were needed.

The three new start times proposed are 7:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. Currently, bell times are [7:55 a.m. and 8:55 a.m.](#)

If the proposal passes, the majority of elementary schools will start at 7:30 a.m., although some are scheduled to start at 8:30 a.m. or 9:30 a.m. All high schools and some middle schools will start at 8:30 a.m., and a mix of elementary, middle and K-8 schools will begin at 9:30 a.m.

High schoolers would start 25 minutes earlier than they do currently — a concern for families, Davies said. But a 9:30 a.m. start time for high school students, she said, would interfere with after-school sports and other activities.

Davies also acknowledged the changes could be difficult for staff at schools with the earliest proposed start time.

Jessica Swanson has a third grader at Kimball Elementary who would have to go to school at 7:30 a.m. next school year if the proposed bell times are approved.

“We’re not looking forward to being in the dark sitting out there in the cold waiting for the bus,” Swanson said. “It’s an inconvenience for sure.”

West Seattle parent Aimee Riordan said she would like to see Seattle Schools take a different approach to address transportation issues that won’t affect student schedules.

The last time the district changed start times, the change was based on the science that students would benefit from more sleep, said Riordan. “Having school start so early for the purpose of transportation-related adjustments seems like bad policy and bad precedent.”

Seattle Schools officials have also heard concerns from parents about child care. Schedule changes could increase child care needs and after-school programs would need to be adjusted. Many older students also care for their younger siblings, and different dismissal times could complicate that.

But the changes could have benefits, Davies said. With this new model, all students eligible for transportation would be served and there is potential for buses to be used for other activities. Bus drivers would also be paid more and have the opportunity for more hours.

It’s unclear how much more bus drivers would make if new start times are approved by the board. Seattle Schools declined requests for interviews.

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HEADLINE	04/28 NATO reinforce Finland, Sweden security?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/28/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#nato-searches-for-ways-to-help-defend-sweden-and-finland-even-before-they-formally-join
GIST	<p>NATO is exploring ways to reinforce security for Finland and Sweden should they ask to join the alliance, even in the period before the other 30 member countries ratify their membership, officials said.</p> <p>Right now, Sweden and Finland are at their most vulnerable. Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February, the two Nordic countries have said they are likely to seek NATO membership but have not formally done so. The ratification process takes time, and the countries cannot count on NATO to come to their military aid until it is completed.</p> <p>Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary general, said on Thursday that he had discussed with Finland and Sweden ways to make arrangements before they are covered by the group’s security guarantee.</p> <p>“I’m confident that there are ways to bridge that interim period in a way which is good enough and works for both Finland and Sweden,” Mr. Stoltenberg said at the European Parliament in Brussels. He did not explain what arrangements were under consideration.</p> <p>In recent weeks, Sweden and Finland, longtime partners of NATO, have been moving toward requesting formal membership. Only alliance members are covered by the guarantee that an attack on one member is an attack on all, and that the United States and other allies would come to their military aid.</p> <p>The Pentagon has not told Sweden or Finland that the U.S. would offer a formal security guarantee while their membership is being ratified, officials in Washington said. But the U.S. has bilateral agreements in place with the countries that should help deter Russian aggression aimed at impeding their NATO membership, the officials said.</p>

If Sweden and Finland formally apply, alliance ambassadors are expected to be able to begin the process of ratifying their membership within days, NATO officials said. Russia can be counted upon to oppose their decision and take steps to discourage it.

“When Russia tries in a way to threaten to intimidate Finland and Sweden from not applying, it just demonstrates how Russia is not respecting the basic rights of every nation to choose his own path,” Mr. Stoltenberg said Thursday. “So we are in dialogue with Finland and Sweden. And it’s their decision, but if they decide to apply, Finland and Sweden will be warmly welcomed and expect the process to go quickly.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 US: Russia slow learning from mistakes
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/28/politics/russia-military-progress-eastern-ukraine/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Russian forces have made some progress in Moscow's renewed assault on eastern Ukraine, according to US and NATO officials, as their military tries to fix the myriad problems that plagued the early weeks of the invasion.</p> <p>The US has seen "some evidence" of improvement in Russia's ability to combine air and ground operations, as well as its capacity for resupplying forces in the field, officials say.</p> <p>The progress is "slow and uneven," a senior US defense official said, allowing Russian forces to advance only "several kilometers or so" each day.</p> <p>But the US assesses that Russia is trying to learn from the mistakes it made early on, where columns of tanks and armor ran out of food and fuel, leaving them easy prey to Ukrainian hit-and-run tactics.</p> <p>Russia has placed command and control elements near its border with eastern Ukraine, according to a senior NATO official, a sign they are attempting to fix the communications and coordination failures observed in the attack on Kyiv.</p> <p>Before the invasion began on February 24, Russia amassed 125 to 130 battalion tactical groups, known as BTGs, around Ukraine and near Kyiv in particular, but when the fighting began, Russia's military leaders showed little ability to have them fight as one.</p> <p>There are 92 BTGS in country now, with another 20 just across border in Russia, according to the senior defense official.</p> <p>"The attacks are somewhat better coordinated but with small formations. Company size units with helicopter support," a European defense official said. "The lowest level of mutual support. In NATO this would be basic stuff."</p> <p>Still, western officials familiar with the latest intelligence say even if Russia has learned key lessons from its systemic failures in the first stage of the conflict, it's not clear that Moscow will be able to implement the necessary changes to dominate in the Donbas region.</p> <p>Its military has suffered heavy losses in both manpower and equipment and officials believe that other equipment relocated from different parts of Ukraine likely isn't fully repaired yet. Many of the fighting units have cobbled together soldiers who have never fought or trained together.</p> <p>"I don't know how many lessons they can actually operationalize. It's not a simple thing," said the senior NATO official. "You don't just move tanks and personnel and say, 'Now go back into the fight!'"</p> <p>US and Western officials largely agree with the assessment that a few weeks is not enough time for Russia to reconstitute its forces from the first phase of the campaign -- which took place across broad swaths of</p>

Ukrainian territory and led to the loss of thousands of Russian soldiers -- and believe Moscow will keep throwing additional forces into the conflict piecemeal.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been under pressure to demonstrate he can show a victory, and eastern Ukraine is the place where he is most likely to be able to quickly do that, US officials say. US intelligence intercepts suggest Putin is focused on May 9, Russia's "Victory Day," but even if he makes some sort of declaration then, officials say it will be unlikely to mark the end of his war on Ukraine.

"I think that date's likely to be a date where something is declared, but then they move on with the rest of the campaign," the senior NATO official said.

A more conventional fight

US and western officials caution that Russia's renewed assault, focused on breaking through Ukrainian defenses in the east using troops and materiel withdrawn from across the north of the country, is not yet fully underway. Russia continues to barrage Mariupol in the south, but in Donbas, its advances have been far more incremental.

Officials anticipate the second phase of the campaign, focused on eastern Ukraine, will in some ways unfold quite differently from the initial assault that largely focused on capturing major urban areas. The dry and grassy plain isn't homogenous across the region, but in places may favor more conventional tank warfare. And unlike in the rest of the country, Ukraine has been fighting Russian-backed separatists there from dug-in trench positions since 2014.

"This renewed effort in Donbas, we'll see Russia mounting a campaign that I think is going to look a lot like conventional fights, really going back to World War I and World War II: much heavier equipment, different terrain, much more open," said the senior NATO official.

Russia is "sticking much more to a classic Russian military doctrine this time," said another NATO official -- in part because the proximity to the Russian border allows Russia to maintain shorter, more efficient supply lines. Russian forces have offered more coordinated air support to troops on the ground in Donbas and have been "putting troops in less danger to keep casualties lower."

Western officials expect Russia to launch a three-pronged offensive to try to isolate and defeat the Ukrainian forces in a pincer.

"The concerns of the fight in the east are multifold," Rep. Mike Quigley, a Democrat from Illinois, told CNN. "First of all, this is better terrain for the Russians. Second, shorter supply lines, lessons learned, and the fact that you've got a very angry Putin who is trying to rehabilitate, I think, the Russian military to the rest of the world."

One of Russia's key advantages remains the sheer size of the military force and the equipment the Kremlin has committed to this war. Last week, the US assessed about 75% of the forces it prepped for this invasion to be still intact, and the Kremlin has shown a willingness to commit as many forces as needed for their stated objective of controlling the Donbas region.

It has a military "mass" that it is willing to throw at the objective until it is complete, one source told CNN, noting Putin has shown a complete indifference to how many Russian forces are killed in the process.

No guaranteed outcome

Still, despite the military advantages Russia still has, it's unclear whether it's enough to guarantee them the battlefield success that they failed to achieve around Kyiv and elsewhere.

Russian units are in worse shape than expected, according to a US assessment, a defense official told CNN. "Some tanks have a driver and no crew," the official said. "Some (armored personnel carriers) have no one out the back."

Some of the units are down to 70% strength, the official noted, which is the line where western combat doctrine states that a unit can no longer be combat effective. The Russians have used poorly maintained and outdated equipment to refit their BTGs, mixing modernized and unmodernized equipment that could degrade their ability to effectively maneuver on the battlefield.

At each step, Russia's attack on the Donbas region faces the same stiff Ukrainian resistance that stopped their advance toward Kyiv, with one notable difference. Ukrainian forces have fought Russian-backed separatists for years in this region, offering them ample time to dig into fortified defense positions.

The Ukrainians are integrating new weapons and vehicles received from other countries, including the US, and continuing to exact a heavy toll, one source familiar with the situation told CNN.

And as Russia has to extend its supply lines into Donbas, they will become more vulnerable, the source said.

US officials also continue to take note of the composition of the Russian army, including Putin's move to extend enlistments and pull up the next wave of conscripts -- many of whom have been inactive for a long time.

This suggests Putin is "scraping bottom of the barrel," the source familiar with the situation said.

"Putin faces a conundrum. His force is declining in capability and his personnel status is one of his biggest problems. Reaching into the reserves aren't going to help ... in fact, I'd suggest that's going to hurt. It may provide 'bodies' but not trained soldiers who will make a difference," CNN military analyst and retired Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling said.

And the morale issues that have bedeviled Russian forces are still present.

"We have some early indications that while the conscripts start out with high morale because they've been feasting on Russian propaganda, it doesn't take very long before that morale is sapped once they get put into combat and face Ukrainian resistance," said the senior defense official Thursday on a background call with reporters.

Finally, the weather may hamper Russian tanks. Mud may force them to stick to the roads, leaving them vulnerable to Ukrainian forces, as was the case on the outskirts of Kyiv. And taking urban areas in any war is challenging -- and favors the defender.

"I don't think the war is going to be over in the near term," said the senior NATO official.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Family: American killed fighting in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/28/politics/american-killed-ukraine/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)An American citizen, Willy Joseph Cancel, was killed fighting alongside Ukrainian forces in Ukraine, members of Cancel's family confirmed to CNN.</p> <p>The 22-year-old was working with a private military contracting company when he was killed on Monday.</p> <p>The company had sent him to Ukraine, and he was being paid while he was fighting there, Cancel's mother, Rebecca Cabrera, told CNN.</p> <p>Cancel, a former US Marine, according to his mother, signed up to work for the private military contracting company on top of his full-time job as a corrections officer in Tennessee shortly before the war in Ukraine broke out at the end of February, Cabrera said. When the war began, the company, according to Cabrera, was searching for contractors to fight in Ukraine and Cancel agreed to go, Cabrera said.</p>

"He wanted to go over because he believed in what Ukraine was fighting for, and he wanted to be a part of it to contain it there so it didn't come here, and that maybe our American soldiers wouldn't have to be involved in it," Cabrera told CNN in a phone interview.

Cancel flew to Poland on March 12 and crossed into Ukraine sometime over March 12 and 13, Cabrera said.

Cancel was formerly a US Marine, according to his mother, Rebecca Cabrera.

The group of men Cancel was fighting alongside were from "all different countries," Cabrera said.

Cabrera was told by those who notified her of her son's death that his body had not been found.

"They haven't found his body," she said. "They are trying, the men that were with him, but it was either grab his body or get killed, but we would love for him to come back to us."

A State Department official said they are "aware of these reports and are closely monitoring the situation."

"Due to privacy considerations, we have no further comment," the official added. "We once again reiterate US citizens should not travel to Ukraine due to the active armed conflict and the singling out of US citizens in Ukraine by Russian government security officials, and that US citizens in Ukraine should depart immediately if it is safe to do so, using any commercial or other privately available ground transportation options."

Cancel leaves behind a 7-month-old baby and a wife, Cabrera said. Cancel was living in Tennessee before he left for Ukraine, and is originally from Orange County, New York, said Devin Tietze Jr., Cancel's brother-in-law.

Cabrera said Cancel "always put everybody ahead of himself."

"He was just a really thoughtful person. He always put everybody ahead of himself even when situations were so stressful," Cabrera said of her son. "He always kept everybody laughing and calm. He was the man that stood up when everybody else stood back."

Tietze said Cancel was the "type to fight for what's right regardless of the outcome," when asked why Cancel had decided to join the fight in Ukraine.

"He believed wholeheartedly this shouldn't have happened and he wanted to go help the people in Ukraine," Tietze said in a phone interview.

Willy Joseph Cancel, an American citizen, was killed fighting alongside Ukrainians in Ukraine.

Cabrera said Cancel "wanted" to do the military contract work.

"It was something that he believed in his heart, that was the right thing. He was the type of man who always stepped up when everybody else stepped back, and there were a lot of men who were like that that were with him," Cabrera said.

Earlier on Thursday the British government confirmed a UK citizen had been killed in Ukraine and said officials are "urgently seeking further information" on another who is missing, a UK Foreign Office spokesperson told CNN.

"We can confirm that a British national has been killed in Ukraine and are supporting their family," they said.

	<p>The Ukrainian Defense Ministry created a special unit, the International Legion, for foreign fighters who wanted to join the fight against Russia. More than 20,000 volunteers and veterans from 52 countries had expressed their desire to join the fight as of March 7, according to Brig. Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, commander of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry, which will run this legion.</p> <p>CNN previously reported on foreign nationals, including citizens from the US and the UK, who had left home to join the fight in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Turkey president visits Saudi Arabia
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/turkeys-erdogan-travels-riyadh-fence-mending-effort-84363729
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL -- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan landed in Saudi Arabia on Thursday evening in a major reset of relations between two regional heavyweights following the slaying of a Saudi columnist in Istanbul.</p> <p>The visit marks the latest in Ankara's bridge-building efforts with its key regional rival. It is also Erdogan's first visit to the kingdom since 2017, the year before the murder in Turkey of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents.</p> <p>Erdogan was greeted at the airport in the Red Sea city of Jiddah by the Mecca governor. Official photos released by the Saudi Press Agency and the kingdom's Media Ministry showed Turkey's leader accompanied by his wife upon landing.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Turkey dropped the trial of 26 Saudis suspected of involvement in the killing of Khashoggi, who'd written columns critical of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for The Washington Post. The move was largely seen as a gesture that paved the way for Erdogan's trip to Saudi Arabia, where he is expected to meet with both King Salman and the crown prince.</p> <p>Erdogan said his talks in Jiddah will focus on ways to increase cooperation but also discuss regional and international developments.</p> <p>"It is in our common interest to increase our cooperation with Saudi Arabia in areas such as health, energy, food security, agricultural technologies, defense industry and finance," Erdogan said.</p> <p>Erdogan noted that his two-day visit reflects "our common will to start a new period of cooperation as two brotherly countries." It also comes during the last week of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which he described as an auspicious time for "strengthening the bonds of brotherhood."</p> <p>"With this understanding, we are we are engaged in sincere efforts to ensure peace in our region, to solve problems through dialogue and diplomacy," Erdogan said.</p> <p>Erdogan is also expected to visit Mecca for prayers at Islam's holiest site in the final nights of Ramadan.</p> <p>Turkey's diplomatic drive has coincided with its worst economic crisis in two decades, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and now the war in Ukraine. Official inflation stands at 61% while the national currency, the lira, has plummeted, falling 44% in value against the dollar in 2021.</p> <p>The decision earlier this month to transfer the prosecution in Khashoggi's slaying to Saudi Arabia removed the last stumbling block to renewed Turkey-Saudi ties, in particular in Erdogan's relationship with de-facto Saudi ruler, the crown prince.</p> <p>The killing of Khashoggi in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul sparked global outrage and put pressure on the prince, who was said to have approved the operation to kill or capture Khashoggi, according to a</p>

U.S. intelligence assessment. The prince has denied any knowledge of the operation that was carried out by agents who worked directly for him.

Erdogan, while not naming the prince, has said that the order to carry out the assassination came from the “highest levels” of the Saudi government. Turkish authorities also shared audio of the killing with Western intelligence and a U.N. investigator.

A court in Saudi Arabia acquitted officials who oversaw the operation, ultimately sentencing five people to death before they were pardoned. The trial was described as a sham by rights groups.

Turkey, meanwhile, had launched a case in absentia against 26 Saudi suspects. The April 7 transfer of the case to Saudi Arabia came at the request of the Turkish prosecutor, who said there was no prospect of arresting or taking statements from the defendants.

Khashoggi’s Turkish fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, appealed the decision, but an administrative court rejected her appeal last week.

Over the past year, Ankara has embarked on a diplomatic push to reset relations with countries such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia after years of antagonism following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

Turkey’s support for organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood initially spurred the break with Arab governments that saw the group’s vision political Islam as a threat.

Later developments, particularly the blockade of Turkish ally Qatar by its Gulf Arab neighbors, reinforced the split. The lifting of the embargo by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain early last year paved the way for reconciliation with Qatar, though relations remained sour with Turkey.

Erdogan last visited Saudi Arabia in July 2017 as he attempted to resolve the blockade on Qatar imposed the previous month. His foreign minister, however, has visited Saudi Arabia in the time since Khashoggi’s killing and Erdogan has held calls with the king.

In February, Erdogan received a fanfare welcome in the UAE as Dubai’s Burj Khalifa was lit up with the Turkish flag and Turkey’s national anthem blared out.

In past months, Turkey secured a \$4.9 billion currency swap deal with Abu Dhabi, following similar agreements with Qatar, China and South Korea. The UAE also announced a \$10 billion fund to support investments in Turkey.

The end of an unofficial Saudi boycott of Turkish goods, which cut Ankara’s exports by 90%, saw trade to Saudi Arabia reach \$58 million last month, triple the level of the previous year in a sign relations were starting to warm, but still a fraction of the \$5 billion in bilateral trade in 2018, the year Khashoggi was killed.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Heat wave scorches India wheat crop
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/heat-wave-scorches-indias-wheat-crop-snags-export-84389631
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- An unusually early, record-shattering heat wave in India has reduced wheat yields, raising questions about how the country will balance its domestic needs with ambitions to increase exports and make up for shortfalls due to Russia's war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Gigantic landfills in India's capital New Delhi have caught fire in recent weeks. Schools in eastern Indian state Odisha have been shut for a week and in neighboring West Bengal, schools are stocking up on oral rehydration salts for kids. On Tuesday, Rajgarh, a city of over 1.5 million people in central India, was the</p>

country's hottest, with daytime temperatures peaking at 46.5 degrees Celsius (114.08 Fahrenheit). Temperatures breached the 45 C (113 F) mark in nine other cities.

But it was the heat in March — the hottest in India since records first started being kept in 1901 — that stunted crops. Wheat is very sensitive to heat, especially during the final stage when its kernels mature and ripen. Indian farmers time their planting so that this stage coincides with India's usually cooler spring.

Climate change has made India's heat wave hotter, said Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at the Imperial College of London. She said that before human activities increased global temperatures, heat waves like this year's would have struck India once in about half a century.

"But now it is a much more common event — we can expect such high temperatures about once in every four years," she said.

India's vulnerability to extreme heat increased 15% from 1990 to 2019, according to a 2021 report by the medical journal The Lancet. It is among the top five countries where vulnerable people, like the old and the poor, have the highest exposure to heat. It and Brazil have the the highest heat-related mortality in the world, the report said.

Farm workers like Baldev Singh are among the most vulnerable. Singh, a farmer in Sangrur in northern India's Punjab state, watched his crop shrivel before his eyes as an usually cool spring quickly shifted to unrelenting heat. He lost about a fifth of his yield. Others lost more.

"I am afraid the worst is yet to come," Singh said.

Punjab is India's "grain bowl" and the government has encouraged cultivation of wheat and rice here since the 1960s. It is typically the biggest contributor to India's national reserves and the government had hoped to buy about a third of this year's stock from the region. But government assessments predict lower yields this year, and Devinder Sharma, an agriculture policy expert in northern Chandigarh city, said he expected to get 25% less.

The story is the same in other major wheat-producing states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Overall, India purchased over 43 million metric tons (47.3 million U.S. tons) of wheat in 2021. Sharma estimates it will instead get 20% to nearly 50% less.

Even though it is the world's second-largest producer of wheat, India exports only a small fraction of its harvest. It had been looking to capitalize on the global disruption to wheat supplies from Russia's war in Ukraine and find new markets for its wheat in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

That looks uncertain given the tricky balance the government must maintain between demand and supply. It needs about 25 million tons (27.5 million U.S. tons) of wheat for the vast food welfare program that usually feeds more than 80 million people.

Before the pandemic, India had vast stocks that far exceeded its domestic needs — a buffer against the risk of famine.

Those reserves have been strained, Sharma said, by distribution of free grain during the pandemic to about 800 million people — vulnerable groups like migrant workers. The program was extended until September but it's unclear if it will continue beyond then.

"We are no longer with that kind of a surplus . . . with exports now picking up, there would be a lot of pressure on the domestic availability of wheat," Sharma said.

India's federal agriculture and commerce ministries didn't respond to questions sent to them via email.

	<p>Beyond India, other countries are also grappling with poor harvests that hinder their ability to help offset the potential shortfall of supplies from Russia and Ukraine, normally the world's largest and fifth-largest exporters of wheat.</p> <p>China's agriculture minister, Tang Renjian, said last month that the winter wheat harvest was likely to be poor, hindered by flooding and by delays in planting.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Russians pound targets throughout Ukraine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/european-leaders-blast-cutoff-russian-gas-blackmail-84362302
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Russia pounded targets from practically one end of Ukraine to the other Thursday, including Kyiv, bombarding the city while the head of the United Nations was visiting in the boldest attack on the capital since Moscow's forces retreated weeks ago.</p> <p>Nearly a dozen people were wounded in the attack on Kyiv, including one who lost a leg and others who were trapped in the rubble when two buildings were hit, rescue officials said.</p> <p>The bombardment came barely an hour after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held a news conference with U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, who said Ukraine has become “an epicenter of unbearable heartache and pain.” A spokesperson said Guterres and his team were safe.</p> <p>Meanwhile, explosions were reported across the country, in Polonne in the west, Chernihiv near the border with Belarus, and Fastiv, a large railway hub southwest of the capital. The mayor of Odesa, in southern Ukraine, said rockets were intercepted by air defenses.</p> <p>Ukrainian authorities also reported intense Russian fire in the Donbas — the eastern industrial heartland that the Kremlin says is its main objective — and near Kharkiv, a northeastern city outside the Donbas that is seen as key to the offensive.</p> <p>In the ruined southern port city of Mariupol, Ukrainian fighters holed up in the steel plant that represents the last pocket of resistance said concentrated bombing overnight killed and wounded more people. And authorities warned that a lack of safe drinking water inside the city could lead to outbreaks of deadly diseases such as cholera and dysentery.</p> <p>In Zaporizhzhia, a crucial way station for tens of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing Mariupol, an 11-year-old boy was among at least three people wounded in a rocket attack that authorities said was the first to hit a residential area in the southern city since the war began. Shards of glass cut the boy’s leg to the bone.</p> <p>Vadym Vodostoyev, the boy’s father, said: “It just takes one second and you’re left with nothing.”</p> <p>The fresh attacks came as Guterres surveyed the destruction in small towns outside the capital that saw some of the worst horrors of the first onslaught of the war. He condemned the atrocities committed in towns like Bucha, where evidence of mass killings of civilians was found after Russia withdrew in early April in the face of unexpectedly stiff resistance.</p> <p>“Wherever there is a war, the highest price is paid by civilians,” the U.N. chief lamented.</p> <p>Separately, Ukraine’s prosecutor accused 10 Russian soldiers of being “involved in the torture of peaceful people” in Bucha. Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova did not say her office had filed criminal charges, and she appealed to the public for help in gathering evidence. Russia denies it targets civilians.</p> <p>During his nightly video address, Zelenskyy renewed his pledge to hold Russian soldiers accountable for crimes they commit and said about the 10 identified earlier Thursday: “Some of them may not, after all,</p>

live until a trial and fair punishment. But only for one reason: This Russian brigade has been transferred to the Kharkiv region. There they'll receive retribution from our military."

In the attack on Kyiv, explosions shook the city and flames poured out of windows in at least two buildings — including a residential one — in the capital, which has been relatively unscathed in recent weeks. Ukrainian emergency services said 10 people were wounded in the attack, which sent plumes of smoke billowing over the city.

The explosions in northwestern Kyiv's Shevchenkivsky district came as residents have been increasingly returning to the city. Cafes and other businesses have reopened, and a growing numbers of people have been out and about, enjoying the spring weather.

It was not immediately clear how far away the attack was from Guterres.

Getting a full picture of the unfolding battle in the east has been difficult because airstrikes and artillery barrages have made it extremely dangerous for reporters to move around. Several journalists have been killed in the war, now in its third month.

Also, both Ukraine and the Moscow-backed rebels fighting in the east have introduced tight restrictions on reporting from the combat zone.

Western officials say the Kremlin's apparent goal is to take the Donbas by encircling and crushing Ukrainian forces from the north, south and east.

But so far, Russia's troops and their allied separatist forces appear to have made only minor gains, taking several small towns as they try to advance in relatively small groups against staunch Ukrainian resistance.

Russian military units were mauled in the abortive bid to storm Kyiv and had to regroup and refit. Some analysts say the delay in launching a full-fledged offensive may reflect a decision by Russian President Vladimir Putin to wait until his forces are ready for a decisive battle, instead of rushing in and risking another failure that could shake his rule amid worsening economic conditions at home because of Western sanctions.

Many observers suspect Putin wants to be able to claim a big victory in the east by Victory Day, on May 9, one of the proudest holidays on the Russian calendar, marking the defeat of Nazi Germany during World War II.

As Russia presses its offensive, civilians again bear the brunt.

"It's not just scary. It's when your stomach contracts from pain," said Kharkiv resident Tatiana Pirogova. "When they shoot during the day, it's still OK, but when the evening comes, I can't describe how scary it is."

Ukraine's military said that Russian troops were subjecting several places in the Donbas to "intense fire" and that over the past 24 hours, Ukrainian forces had repelled six attacks in the region.

Four civilians were killed in heavy shelling of residential areas in the Luhansk region of the Donbas, according to the regional governor.

Columns of smoke could be seen rising at different points across the Donetsk region of the Donbas, and artillery and sirens were heard on and off.

Many of the Russian troops who were in Mariupol have been leaving and moving to the northwest, a senior U.S. defense official said Thursday. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. military assessment, didn't have exact numbers but said a "significant number" of the roughly one dozen battalion tactical groups that were in the city were moving out.

	<p>Russian forces are making slow, incremental progress in the Donbas — gaining only several kilometers on any given day, the official said. As of Thursday, Russia had launched about 1,900 missiles into Ukraine — the vast majority fired from outside Ukraine’s borders. Most are strikes on Mariupol and the Donbas.</p> <p>In Mariupol, video posted online by Ukraine's Azov Regiment inside the steel plant showed people combing through the rubble to remove the dead and help the wounded. The regiment said the Russians hit an improvised underground hospital and its surgery room, killing an unspecified number of people. The video couldn't be independently verified.</p> <p>An estimated 100,000 people remained trapped in Mariupol.</p> <p>“Deadly epidemics may break out in the city due to the lack of centralized water supply and sewers,” the city council said on the messaging app Telegram. It reported bodies decaying under the rubble and a “catastrophic” shortage of drinking water and food.</p> <p>Ukraine has urged its allies to send even more military equipment to fend off the Russians. U.S. President Joe Biden asked Congress for an additional \$33 billion to help Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 NATO: Finland, Sweden could join quickly
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/nato-chief-finland-sweden-join-quickly-84365858
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS -- NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday that Finland and Sweden would be embraced with open arms should they decide to join the 30-nation military organization and could become members quite quickly.</p> <p>Stoltenberg’s remarks came as public support in Finland and Sweden for NATO membership mounts in response to Russia’s war in Ukraine. Media speculation in the two countries suggest the two might apply in mid-May.</p> <p>“It’s their decision,” Stoltenberg said. “But if they decide to apply, Finland and Sweden will be warmly welcomed, and I expect that process to go quickly.”</p> <p>He gave no precise time frame, but did say that the two could expect some protection should Russia try to intimidate them from the time their membership applications are made until they formally join.</p> <p>Stoltenberg said he’s “confident that there are ways to bridge that interim period in a way which is good enough and works for both Finland and Sweden.”</p> <p>NATO’s collective security guarantee ensures that all member countries must come to the aid of any ally under attack. Stoltenberg added that many NATO allies have now pledged and provided a total of at least \$8 billion in military support to Ukraine.</p> <p>Before launching the war in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded that NATO stop expanding and pull its troops back from Russia’s borders. So the prospect of neighboring Finland, and Sweden, joining the trans-Atlantic alliance is unlikely to be welcomed in Moscow.</p> <p>Finland has a conflict-ridden history with Russia, with which it shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border. Finns have taken part in dozens of wars against their eastern neighbor, for centuries as part of the Swedish Kingdom, and as an independent nation including two fought with the Soviet Union from 1939-40 and 1941-44.</p> <p>In the postwar period, however, Finland pursued pragmatic political and economic ties with Moscow, remaining militarily nonaligned and a neutral buffer between East and West.</p>

	<p>Sweden has avoided military alliances for more than 200 years, choosing a path of peace after centuries of warfare with its neighbors.</p> <p>Both countries put an end to traditional neutrality by joining the European Union in 1995 and deepening cooperation with NATO. However, a majority of people in both countries remained firmly against full membership in the alliance — until now.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/28 Govts do intentionally shutdown internet
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/governments-intentionally-shut-down-internet-182-times-across-34-countries-in-2021-report/
GIST	<p>Dozens of repressive governments intentionally shut down their country’s internet as a way to stop protests or stifle dissent in 2021, according to a new report from Access Now, a nonprofit tracking internet access globally.</p> <p>According to their data, authorities deliberately shut down the internet at least 182 times across 34 countries last year, both of which were increases on the figures seen in 2020.</p> <p>Authorities in Burkina Faso, Cuba, Chad, Eswatini, Iran, Jordan, Myanmar, Niger, Pakistan, Sudan and more shut down the internet in response to protest movements while internet shut downs in the Gaza Strip, Myanmar, and Ethiopia’s Tigray region were instituted during military conflicts.</p> <p>Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Iran, Niger, Uganda, and Zambia shut down the internet during elections, according to Access Now, which added that Benin, Iraq, and The Gambia shut down their internet during “key national events” like school exams.</p> <p>Felicia Anthonio, #KeepItOn Campaign Manager at Access Now, said the shut downs intentionally disrupted not only everyday life, but “critical moments in a nation’s epoch.”</p> <p>“Authorities shut down the internet to shut down democracy. That’s 182 times a leader decided to deliberately silence a people instead of empowering them to speak,” Anthonio said.</p> <p>Access Now noted that the biggest offender was India, which shut down its internet in sections of the country at least 106 times. This is the fourth consecutive year India has topped the list.</p> <p>In 2021, Access Now found that Myanmar shut down the internet at least 15 times while Sudan and Iran shut down the internet at least five times each.</p> <p>The longest internet shutdowns occurred in Pakistan, where 4.5 million residents of the Federally Administered Tribal Area spent nearly four years without internet. The blackout ended in December after starting in 2016.</p> <p>People living in Rakhine State in Myanmar spent 593 days without internet until February 3, 2021 and residents of Jammu and Kashmir in India spent 551 days without internet. The people of Tigray, a northern province of Ethiopia, have spent 539 days without internet and the outage continues to this day.</p> <p>Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cuba, Eswatini, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uganda were among the 18 governments that shut down mobile internet as a way to crack down on protests.</p>

These kinds of shut downs happened at least 37 times in 2021, a marked increase compared to the 15 times seen in 2020.

The governments of 22 countries instituted more targeted outages, blocking access to social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok during protests. Some went further, blocking or criminalizing the use of VPNs to get around outages.

Internet shutdowns were particularly popular during multiple coups in 2021. Sudan, Myanmar and other militaries preemptively shut down internet access before removing civilian governments from power, hoping to stop push back.

“Internet shutdowns and the rise of authoritarianism go hand-in-hand,” said Marianne Díaz Hernández, #KeepItOn Fellow at Access Now. “In 2021, governments across the globe proved how powerful blackouts can be as all-in-one tools to assert control over populations. But we — civil society, the tech industry, UN bodies — also proved how powerful people can be in resisting and fighting this unstable online despotism.”

Hanna Kreitem, a technical expert for Internet Society, has been tracking global internet shutdowns for years through the organization’s Pulse Platform.

Kreitem told The Record that internet outages affect people’s opportunities, livelihoods, health, education and can prevent them from taking part in daily activities.

Kreitem noted that the current global pandemic has seen many government, health and commercial services move online, further reinforcing how important reliable and stable Internet access is for everyone and making the consequences of shutdowns for citizens even more severe.

“During a shutdown, it becomes harder for people to contact family members and friends in other parts of the country, or in other countries and in times of political unrest this can be particularly difficult,” Kreitem said. “Governments often use shutdowns to restrict access to information and to curb citizen mobilization. This impacts the ability of citizens to demonstrate peacefully or get accurate information in times of unrest or emergency.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 Cyberattacks rage in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/cyberwar-ukraine-military/179421/
GIST	<p>Cyberattacks against Ukraine have been used strategically to support ground campaigns, with five state-sponsored advanced persistent threat (APT) groups behind attacks that began in February. According to research published by Microsoft on Wednesday, the APTs involved in the campaigns are state-sponsored by Russia.</p> <p>Separate reports published this week also shed new light on the wave of cyberattacks against Ukrainian digital assets by APTs with ties to Russia.</p> <p>Microsoft researchers believe six separate Russia-aligned threat actors carried out 237 cyber operations that resulted in threats to civilian welfare and attempted to carry out dozens of cyberespionage attacks against Ukrainian targets.</p> <p>Moreover, Russia is believed to be using cyberattacks in a type of “hybrid war”, according to a blog post by Tom Burt, corporate vice president of Customer Security and Trust at Microsoft. That correlates “with its kinetic military operations targeting services and institutions crucial for civilians,” he said.</p> <p>“The attacks have not only degraded the systems of institutions in Ukraine but have also sought to disrupt people’s access to reliable information and critical life services on which civilians depend, and have attempted to shake confidence in the country’s leadership,” Burt wrote.</p>

Meanwhile, researchers at Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) have been doing analysis of their own on the cyber-attacks that have been hampered the country in the lead up to and during the war. The agency said [it recorded](#) 802 cyber attacks in the first quarter of 2022 alone, more than double the number for the same period last year, which was 362.

Carrying out those attacks are primarily five known Russia or Belarus-sponsored APTs, CERT-UA said. Specifically, those groups are: Armageddon/Garmaredon, UNC1151, Fancy Bear/APT28, AgentTesla/XLoader and Pandora hVNC/GrimPlant/GraphSteel.

‘Hybrid’ War

Microsoft security teams have been working closely with Ukrainian government officials as well as both government and private-enterprise cybersecurity staff to identify and remediate threat activity against Ukrainian networks, researchers said.

Russia appears to have been preparing for the land conflict with Ukraine in cyberspace about a year before the war began, or since March 2021, according to the report.

In the lead up to the ground conflict and the subsequent invasion, threat groups with known or suspected ties Russia “continuously developed and used destructive wiper malware or similarly destructive tools on targeted Ukrainian networks at a pace of two to three incidents a week,” researchers found.

“From February 23 to April 8, we saw evidence of nearly 40 discrete destructive attacks that permanently destroyed files in hundreds of systems across dozens of organizations in Ukraine,” they wrote.

Even before that, in January, Microsoft identified a Master Boot Record (MBR) [wiper](#) attack that it named [WhisperGate](#) targeting Ukraine to permanently disrupt organizations across the country and paint it as a failed state. Wipers are the most destructive of malware types because they permanently delete and destroy data and/or systems, causing great financial and reputational damage to victims.

From late February to mid-March, [another series of wiper attacks](#) using malware called HermeticWiper, IsaacWiper and CaddyWiper targeted organizations in the Ukraine as Russia commenced its physical invasion.

Attacks on Critical Infrastructure

In its latest report, Microsoft said that more than 40 percent of the destructive attacks against Ukraine were aimed at organizations in critical infrastructure sectors that could have negative second-order effects on the government, military, economy and the country’s people.

Moreover, 32 percent of destructive incidents affected Ukrainian government organizations at the national, regional and city levels.

“Acknowledging that there is ongoing activity that we cannot see, we estimate there have been at least eight destructive malware families deployed on Ukrainian networks, including one tailored to industrial control systems (ICS),” researchers wrote. “If threat actors can maintain the current pace of development and deployment, we anticipate more destructive malware will be discovered as the conflict continues.”

The report includes a specific timeline of attacks and the malware used in the earliest weeks of the attack to support Russia’s military activities. In addition to the wipers previously mentioned, other malware deployed in the attacks includes: FoxBlade, DesertBlade, FiberLake, SonicVote and Industroyer2.

Frequent Offenders

On the heels of CERT-UA’s revelation of the top ATPs pummeling Ukraine in cyberspace, research firm Recorded Future’s The Record took [a deeper dive](#) into each other to examine its specific affiliations and modus operandi.

Armageddon/Garmaredon is an aggressive threat actor that's been targeting Ukraine since 2014 and is backed by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). During the Russian war on Ukraine the group has used phishing attacks to distribute malware, most recently new variants of the "Backdoor.Pterodo" malware payload, according to researchers.

UNC1151 is a Belarus-aligned hacking group who has been active since 2016 and has previously targeted government agencies and private organizations in Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Germany, as well as attacked Belarusian dissidents and journalists, researchers said, citing [research from Mandiant](#).

Since Russia attacked Ukraine UNC1151 the group has been linked to the defacement of multiple Ukrainian government websites as well as spearphishing campaigns targeting the email and facebook accounts of Ukrainian military personnel to spread the MicroBackdoor malware.

Fancy Bear/APT 28 is a well-known and prolific actor active since 2017 and backed by Russia's military intelligence service (GRU). The politically motivated group has been linked to activity aiming to influence elections in the [European Union](#) and [the United States](#) as well as attacking sporting authorities connected to [the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games](#).

On Feb. 24, the day Russia attacked Ukraine, Fancy Bear gained access to U.S. satellite communications provider Viasat's KA-SAT network in Ukraine, leaving many Ukrainians without internet access and thus communication capability at the critical time when attacks began, researchers said.

Russian threat actors have used the AgentTesla and XLoader malwares since at least 2014 and 2020, respectively; both have been used in [high-profile attacks](#). During Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one malicious email campaign targeting Ukrainian state organizations used XLoader as its payload, while a phishing campaign targeting Ukrainian citizens spread AgentTesla,, researchers said.

Pandora hVNC/GrimPlant/GraphSteel act as downloaders and droppers under the umbrella term "Elephant Framework," or tools that are written in the same language and used to target government organizations through phishing attacks, researchers said. In two separate malicious phishing campaigns in March, they were used against Ukrainian targets to steal sensitive information from government officials, among others, they said.

History of Cyberattacks in Ukraine

In March, Kaspersky's Global Research and Analysis Team (GReAT) outlined its' [tracking of current and past cyberattacks in Ukraine](#).

"The number of cyberattacks in Ukraine will increase during the next six months. While most of the current attacks are of low complexity – such as DDoS or attacks using commodity and low-quality tools – more sophisticated attacks exist also, and more are expected to come," Kaspersky researchers wrote.

"Current complex activities include the employment of HermeticWiper, which stands out due to its sophistication, as well as the Viasat 'cyber event' – the partial network outage that impacted internet service for fixed broadband customers in Ukraine and elsewhere on the European KA-SAT network that affected over 30,000 plus terminals in Europe," the Kaspersky report added.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Hacking teams under umbrella of TA410
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/experts-detail-3-hacking-teams-working.html
GIST	<p>A cyberespionage threat actor known for targeting a variety of critical infrastructure sectors in Africa, the Middle East, and the U.S. has been observed using an upgraded version of a remote access trojan with information stealing capabilities.</p> <p>Calling TA410 an umbrella group comprised of three teams dubbed FlowingFrog, LookingFrog, and JollyFrog, Slovak cybersecurity firm ESET assessed that "these subgroups operate somewhat</p>

independently, but that they may share intelligence requirements, an access team that runs their spear-phishing campaigns, and also the team that deploys network infrastructure."

TA410 — said to share behavioral and tooling overlaps with [APT10](#) (aka Stone Panda or TA429) — has a history of targeting U.S.-based organizations in the utilities sector as well as diplomatic entities in the Middle East and Africa.

Other identified victims of the hacker collective include a manufacturing company in Japan, a mining business in India, and a charity in Israel, in addition to unnamed victims in the education and military verticals.

TA410 was [first documented](#) by Proofpoint in August 2019 when the threat actor unleashed phishing campaigns containing macro-laden documents to compromise utility providers across the U.S. with a modular malware called LookBack.

Nearly a year later, the group returned with a new backdoor codenamed FlowCloud, also delivered to U.S. utilities providers, that Proofpoint described as malware that gives attackers complete control over infected systems.

"Its remote access trojan (RAT) functionality includes the ability to access installed applications, the keyboard, mouse, screen, files, services, and processes with the ability to exfiltrate information via command-and-control," the company [noted](#) in June 2020.

Industrial cybersecurity firm Dragos, which tracks the activity group under the moniker TALONITE, pointed out the adversary's penchant for blending techniques and tactics in order to ensure a successful intrusion.

"TALONITE focuses on subverting and taking advantage of trust with phishing lures focusing on engineering-specific themes and concepts, malware that abuses otherwise legitimate binaries or modifies such binaries to include additional functionality, and a combination of owned and compromised network infrastructure," Dragos [said](#) in April 2021.

ESET's investigation into the hacking crew's modus operandi and toolset has shed light on a new version of FlowCloud, which comes with the ability to record audio using a computer's microphone, monitor clipboard events, and control attached camera devices to take pictures.

Specifically, the audio recording function is designed to be automatically triggered when sound levels near the compromised computer cross a 65-decibel threshold.

TA410 is also known to take advantage of both spear-phishing and vulnerable internet-facing applications such as Microsoft Exchange, SharePoint, and SQL Servers to gain initial access.

"This indicates to us that their victims are targeted specifically, with the attackers choosing which entry method has the best chance of infiltrating the target," ESET malware researcher Alexandre Côté Cyr [said](#).

Each team within the TA410 umbrella is said to use different toolsets. While JollyFrog relies on off-the-shelf malware such as QuasarRAT and Korplug (aka [PlugX](#)), LookingFrog uses X4, a barebones implant with remote control features, and LookBack.

FlowingFrog, in contrast, employs a downloader called Tendyron that's delivered by means of the [Royal Road RTF weaponizer](#), using it to download FlowCloud as well as a second backdoor, which is based on [Gh0stRAT](#) (aka Farfli).

"TA410 is a cyberespionage umbrella targeting high-profile entities such as governments and universities worldwide," ESET said. "Even though the JollyFrog team uses generic tools, FlowingFrog and LookingFrog have access to complex implants such as FlowCloud and LookBack."

HEADLINE	04/28 Nimbuspwn security flaws haunt Linux
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/microsoft-warns-nimbuspwn-security-flaws-haunting-linux
GIST	<p>Vulnerability researchers at Microsoft are documenting the discovery of a pair of Linux privilege escalation flaws that could be chained together to plant dangerous malware or backdoors.</p> <p>The vulnerabilities, collectively known as Nimbuspwn, provide a roadmap for attackers to elevate privileges to root on many Linux desktop endpoints, Redmond said in a public advisory.</p> <p>Microsoft said its researchers created an experimental exploit capable of delivering a root backdoor with permanent root access.</p> <p>“The vulnerabilities can be chained together to gain root privileges on Linux systems, allowing attackers to deploy payloads, like a root backdoor, and perform other malicious actions via arbitrary root code execution,” said Jonathan Bar Or, a member of the Microsoft 365 Defender Research Team.</p> <p>“The Nimbuspwn bug could potentially be leveraged as a vector for root access by more sophisticated threats, such as malware or ransomware, to achieve greater impact on vulnerable devices,” he added.</p> <p>Bar Or said researchers in the Microsoft 365 Defender Research Team discovered the vulnerabilities by listening to messages on the System Bus while performing code reviews and dynamic analysis on services that run as root.</p> <p>The researchers found an “odd pattern” in a systemd unit called networkd-dispatcher and stumbled onto multiple security concerns, including directory traversal, symlink race, and time-of-check-time-of-use race condition issues.</p> <p>The two vulnerabilities -- CVE-2022-29799 and CVE-2022-29800 -- have been fixed by the maintainer of the open-source project and Microsoft is recommending that Linux admins opt for strong monitoring of the platform’s operating system and its components.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Chickens baked alive in computer glitch
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/chickens-baked-alive-due-to/
GIST	<p>A poultry farm in northern England has been fined after a computer glitch caused tens of thousands of chickens to overheat and die.</p> <p>The tragic incident at Hose Lodge Farm in Colston Bassett, Nottinghamshire, was caused by a “computer malfunction” in a broiler shed ventilation system on a warm spring day.</p> <p>Around 50,000 chickens were inside the shed on May 26 2020 when inlets on the side of the building closed for a scheduled rest period. A fault in the system that regulated air flow to the shed prevented another tunnel ventilation system from opening, turning the shed into a sealed unit.</p> <p>The temperature inside the shed rose rapidly, causing the birds to suffer heat stress. An investigation into the incident by Leicestershire County Council found that an alarm which should have been set to sound when the temperature inside the building reached 27°C (80.6°F) had been incorrectly set to go off at 37°C (98.6°F).</p> <p>By the time staff at the farm were alerted to the problem, more than half the chickens (27,249) had died.</p> <p>The Council's Trading Standards Service prosecuted the company managing the farm, Hudson & Sanders Limited, for being negligent in its care of the birds. The service said that the staffing level on the farm was</p>

	<p>inadequate, and that staff had not received enough training, leaving them unsure of what to do in the event of an overheating incident.</p> <p>At Leicester Magistrates' Court on Wednesday, district judge Nick Watson described the overheating incident as 'a disaster' and said that the chickens which had survived in the extreme temperature would have suffered.</p> <p>According to Leicestershire Live, Hudson & Sanders Limited pleaded guilty to four charges under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Watson fined the company £44K (\$55K) and ordered it to pay the county council's legal costs of £12,634.83 (\$15,715.77).</p> <p>"This was an awful but thankfully rare incident in terms of the scale of unnecessary suffering," said the county council's head of regulatory services, Gary Connors. "However, we hope the level of fine prompts businesses operating in this sector to review their operations to ensure they have adequate staffing and procedures in place to avoid such a distressing incident happening again."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Europol: organized crime eyes deepfakes
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/europol-deepfakes-organized-crime/
GIST	<p>Deepfake technology is set to be used extensively in organized crime over the coming years, according to new research by Europol.</p> <p>Deepfakes involve the application of artificial intelligence to audio and audio-visual content "that convincingly shows people saying or doing things they never did, or create personas that never existed in the first place."</p> <p>Facing Reality? Law enforcement and the challenge of deepfakes, the first published analysis of the Europol Innovation Lab's Observatory function, warned that law enforcement agencies will need to enhance the skills and technologies at officers' disposal to keep pace with criminals' use of deepfakes.</p> <p>The analysis highlighted how deepfakes are being used nefariously in three key areas: disinformation, non-consensual pornography and document fraud. It predicts such attacks will become increasingly realistic and dangerous as the technology improves in the coming years.</p> <p>1) Disinformation: Europol gave several examples of how false information could be spread using deepfakes, leading to potentially devastating consequences. These include in the geopolitical sphere, such as creating a fake emergency alert that warns of an impending attack. In February, before the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the United States accused the Kremlin of a disinformation plot to serve as a pretext for an invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The technology could also be used to target businesses, such as creating a video or audio deepfake that makes it appear as though a company's executive engaged in a controversial or illegal act. In one well-publicized case, criminals defrauded an energy company to the tune of \$243,000 after impersonating the voice of the chief executive.</p> <p>2) Non-consensual pornography: The report cited a study by Sensity, which found that 96% of fake videos involved non-consensual pornography. This typically involves overlaying a victim's face onto the body of a pornography actor, making it appear that the victim is engaging in the act.</p> <p>3) Document fraud: While passports are becoming increasingly difficult to forge due to modern fraud prevention measures, the report found that "synthetic media and digitally manipulated facial images present a new approach for document fraud." For example, these technologies can combine or morph the faces of the person the passport belongs to and the person wanting to obtain a passport illegally, increasing the chances the photo can pass identity checks, including automated ones.</p>

The authors added that, similarly to other tools used in cybercrime, “deepfake capabilities are becoming more accessible for the masses through deepfake apps and websites.”

In addition, the report observed that deepfakes could negatively impact the legal process, for example, by artificially manipulating or generating media to prove or disprove someone’s guilt. In one recent child custody case, a mother of a child manipulated an audio recording of her husband in an attempt to convince the court that he behaved violently towards her.

To effectively deal with these kinds of threats, Europol said law enforcement agencies must develop new skills and technologies. These include manual detection, which involves looking for inconsistencies, and automated detection techniques, including deepfake detection software using artificial intelligence that is being developed by organizations such as Facebook and security firm McAfee.

Policymakers also need to develop more legislation to set guidelines and enforce compliance around the use of deepfakes, the report added.

The researchers stated: “In the months and years ahead, it is highly likely that threat actors will make increasing use of deepfake technology to facilitate various criminal acts and conduct disinformation campaigns to influence or distort public opinion. Advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence will continue enhancing the capabilities of the software used to create deepfakes.”

They added: “The increase in use of deepfakes will require legislation to set guidelines and enforce compliance. Additionally, social networks and other online service providers should play a greater role in identifying and removing deepfake content from their platforms. As the public becomes more educated on deepfakes, there will be increasing concern worldwide about their impact on individuals, communities and democracies.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 Ransom payments small % cost of attack
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ransomware-costs-seven-times-paid/
GIST	<p>Ransom payments are just a small percentage of the total costs victim organizations can expect to pay after a serious breach, according to new research from Check Point.</p> <p>The security vendor analyzed information gleaned from the Conti leaks and ransomware victim data sets from risk quantification firm Kovrr to better understand the impact of attacks.</p> <p>According to the research, threat actors typically demand a ransom between 0.7% and 5% of the target’s annual revenue. The percentage is usually lower for organizations with large revenues.</p> <p>Interestingly, the ransom itself is just a small component of the total cost of a ransomware breach. Check Point estimated the total cost to be seven times higher than the ransom, thanks to threat response, investigation and remediation, legal fees, monitoring and other charges.</p> <p>Factors affecting the negotiations include the quality of the data exfiltrated from the victim, whether they have cyber-insurance, how accurate the estimate of their revenue is and the interests of victim negotiators, the report noted.</p> <p>Check Point claimed the weekly average of organizations impacted by ransomware surged by 24% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2022 to one in 53 enterprises.</p> <p>It also said the “duration” of ransomware attacks had declined significantly, from 15 to nine days, although it’s not clear whether this refers to dwell time or the total duration of an attack from initial access to remediation.</p>

[A recent Splunk report](#) claimed that the average time it takes ransomware to encrypt 100,000 files now is just 43 minutes, but some strains, such as LockBit, take only four minutes.

“The key learning is that the paid ransom, which is the number most researchers deal with, is not a key number in the ransomware ecosystem. Both cybercriminals and victims have many other financial aspects and considerations around the attack,” argued Check Point threat intelligence group manager, Sergey Shykevich.

“It’s remarkable just how systematic these cyber-criminals are in defining the ransom number and in the negotiation. Nothing is casual and everything is defined and planned according to factors that we’ve described. Our message to the public is that building in advance proper cyber defenses, especially a well-defined response plan to ransomware attacks, can save a lot of money for organizations.”

According to [separate research](#), the average ransom payment in Q4 2021 stood at \$322,168. [According to IBM](#), the average ransomware attack now costs \$4.6m, higher than the average for regular breaches (\$4.2m).

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HEADLINE	04/28 Ukraine targeted by DDoS attacks
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ukraine-targeted-by-ddos-attacks-from-compromised-wordpress-sites/
GIST	<p>Ukraine's computer emergency response team (CERT-UA) has published an announcement warning of ongoing DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks targeting pro-Ukraine sites and the government web portal.</p> <p>The threat actors, who at this time remain unknown, are compromising WordPress sites and injecting malicious JavaScript code to perform the attacks.</p> <p>These scripts are placed in the HTML structure of the main files of the website and are base64-encoded to evade detection.</p> <p>The code runs on the website visitor's computer and directs their available computational resources to generate an abnormal number of requests to attack objects (URLs) defined in the code.</p> <p>The result is that some of the target websites are overwhelmed by the requests and, as a result, rendered inaccessible to their regular visitors.</p> <p>This all happens without the owners or the visitors of the compromised sites ever realizing it, except for maybe some barely noticeable performance hiccups for the latter.</p> <p>In March, a similar DDoS campaign was conducted using the same script but against a smaller set of pro-Ukrainian websites, as well as against Russian targets.</p> <p>Detection and response</p> <p>The CERT-UA is working closely with the National Bank of Ukraine to implement defensive measures against this DDoS campaign.</p> <p>The agency has informed the owners, registrars, and hosting service providers of the compromised websites of the situation and has provided instructions on how to detect and remove the malicious JavaScript from their sites.</p> <p>"To detect similar to the mentioned abnormal activity in the log files of the web server, you should pay attention to the events with the response code 404 and, if they are abnormal, correlate them with the values of the HTTP header "Referer", which will contain the address of the web resource initiated a request," advises CERT-UA.</p>

At this time, at least 36 confirmed websites are channeling malicious garbage requests to the target URLs, but this list could change or be refreshed at any time.

For this reason, CERT-UA has included a detection tool in the report to help all website administrators scan their sites now and in the future.

Additionally, it's important to keep your site's content management systems (CMS) up to date, use the latest available version of any active plugins, and restrict access to the website management pages.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Ransomware crisis deepens
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/ransomware-crisis-deepens-data-recovery-stalls
GIST	<p>When it comes to ransomware, more companies are seeing attacks and have had data encrypted, according to research out this week. And even though more companies are backing up or paying ransom demands, less data was recovered in 2021 compared with the previous year.</p> <p>For instance, in its "State of Ransomware 2022" report, cybersecurity firm Sophos found that 66% of surveyed companies had encountered ransomware in 2021, with two-thirds of those firms — or 43% overall — suffering from an actual attack that encrypted data. In its previous report covering 2020, the frequency of successful attacks was much smaller, with about 20% overall resulting in encryption.</p> <p>The deteriorating cyberthreat landscape is largely due to the evolution of ransomware groups and their techniques, says Sean Gallagher, senior threat researcher with Sophos.</p> <p>"Over the past couple of years, there has been a massive transition from ransomware to ransomware-as-a-service," he says. "There are very well-established [groups] that are doing these attacks, and as a result, the number of attacks companies are seeing has gone up."</p> <p>Ransomware continues to plague companies with business-disrupting attacks and defy efforts by cybersecurity experts to rein in the operators behind the criminals campaigns. Not only did the portion of companies affected by ransomware more than double last year, but the mean ransomware payment more than quadrupled to \$812,000, according to the Sophos report.</p> <p>Companies in the energy and manufacturing sectors each saw average ransoms of more than \$2 million.</p> <p>The research team at Check Point Software Technologies saw an increase in ransomware attacks as well, noting that attempted attacks climbed 24% in 2021 compared with 2020. In an analysis of chat logs leaked from the Conti ransomware group, Check Point Research noted that the operators discussed how to set ransoms in some detail, but also stressed that ransoms often are not the most significant cost to businesses.</p> <p>"[T]he extortion cost is marginal compared to other losses suffered by the victim," the researchers stated. "Most other losses, including response and restoration costs, legal fees, monitoring costs, etc., are applied whether the extortion demand was paid or not."</p> <p>In 2021, the mean ransom paid to cybercriminals rose to \$812,000, from \$170,000 in 2020, but that still fell far short of the average \$1.4 million bill for remediating an attack, according to Sophos. Recovery also took time, with the average company needing about a month to recover from a ransomware attack, according to the report.</p> <p>Don't Expect Your Data Back</p> <p>In addition, while ransom demands have risen dramatically, increases that other surveys have seen hints of as well, paying them does not mean full data recovery. In fact, data-recovery statistics from Sophos highlight the fact that that paying ransoms has a terrible return on investment.</p>

While 99% of companies recovered some of their data, they could only recover 61% of encrypted data on average, according to Sophos. And while 46% of companies paid a ransom, only 4% of those that did got all their data back, down from 8% in 2020. Such statistics have caused some [cybersecurity experts to question whether companies should ever pay the ransom](#).

While healthcare organizations and state and local governments were among top ransomware targets before and during the pandemic, they also earned ransomware groups some of the lowest payouts. The average infected healthcare organization paid \$197,000, while the average compromised state or local government agency paid a ransom of \$214,000, the Sophos survey found.

Cyber insurance Doesn't Solve Ransomware, but It Helps

Cyber insurance has changed along with the ransomware landscape. In 2021, insurance companies already had experienced problems with the expense of cybersecurity policies as companies sought to recover damages from ransomware incidents. The vast majority of companies (94%) have found it harder in the past year to qualify for cyber insurance, while almost all (97%) have had to make changes to their defenses to improve their ability to garner coverage, according to Sophos' survey.

While 98% of companies affected by ransomware received a payout under their cyber-insurance policies, only 77% collected for clean-up costs, and only 40% of the policies paid the ransoms, the survey found.

"It's interesting to note that the sectors with the lowest rate of ransom payment are also the ones able to recover fastest from an incident, emphasizing the importance of disaster-recovery planning and preparation," the report stated.

"It's worth remembering that while cyber insurance will help get you back to your previous state, it doesn't cover 'betterment' — when you need to invest in better technologies and services to address weaknesses that led to the attack."

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HEADLINE	04/28 Report: Lapsus\$ targets SharePoint, VPNs
SOURCE	https://www.techtarget.com/searchsecurity/news/252516516/Lapsus-targeting-SharePoint-VPNs-and-virtual-machines?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A new report shed light on the techniques and tactics of the highly unpredictable Lapsus\$ attacks.</p> <p>NCC Group on Thursday released a report describing how Lapsus\$ attacks are launched and what makes it such a unique group.</p> <p>While Lapsus\$ quieted down following the arrests of alleged members in March, the attacks launched by the group remain perplexing in both their motives and their methods. The group is most known for its attacks on companies like Microsoft, Nvidia, Okta and Samsung.</p> <p>The NCC Group report showed how Lapsus\$ used stolen authentication cookies, specifically ones used for SSO applications, to initially get into its victims' systems. The attackers also scraped Microsoft SharePoint sites used by target organizations, hoping to find credentials within technical documentation.</p> <p>From that initial point of access, Lapsus\$ rapidly climbed up organizations.</p> <p>"Credential harvesting and privileged escalation are key components of the LAPSUS\$ breaches we have seen, with rapid escalation in privileges the LAPSUS\$ group have been seen to elevate from a standard user account to an administrative user within a couple of days," the report said.</p> <p>According to the report, a major goal of the Lapsus\$ attackers was the exploitation of corporate VPNs, capitalizing on the increased use of them over the last few years.</p>

"Access to corporate VPNs is a primary focus for this group as it allows the threat actor to directly access key infrastructure which they require to complete their objectives," the report said. "In our incident response cases, we saw the threat actor leveraging compromised employee email accounts to email helpdesk systems requesting access credentials or support to get access to the corporate VPN."

NCC Group researchers noted that oftentimes Lapsus\$ would reach out to employees directly to get access to network environments and VPNs. In some cases, employees of victim companies would be offered money directly in exchange for their credentials or further information.

Lapsus\$ threat actors rarely used malware and instead embraced "living off the land," according to NCC Group. "In the investigations conducted by NCC Group, little to no malware is used," the report said. "In one case NCC Group observed LAPSUS\$ using nothing more than the legitimate Sysinternals tool ADEplorer, which was used to conduct reconnaissance on the victim's environment."

After the data was stolen, the Lapsus\$ attackers then disrupted and destroyed cloud environments, specifically on-premises VMware ESXi infrastructure, to cover their tracks. For example, NCC Group researchers observed "mass deletion of virtual machines, storage, and configurations in cloud environments making it harder for the victim to recover and for the investigation team to conduct their analysis activities."

When it came Lapsus\$'s goals, the report found that the group often exfiltrated data and destroyed parts of network environments in their attacks. Rather than stealing personal information, Lapsus\$ usually focused on taking source code and intellectual property from companies.

"The theft of data reported appears to heavily be focused on application source code or proprietary technical information," the report said. "With a targeting of internal source code management or repository servers. These git repositories can contain not only commercially sensitive intellectual property, but also in some cases may include additional API keys to sensitive applications including administrative or cloud applications."

Still, NCC Group said it's not clear why Lapsus\$ is focused on breaching major technology companies and obtaining source code, especially since some victims are not approached to pay ransoms. "This distinguishes themselves from more traditional ransomware groups who have a clear modus operandi and are clearly financially focused," the report said. "The result of this is that LAPSUS\$ are less predictable which may be why they have seen recent success."

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HEADLINE	04/28 FBI: online sextortion targets teen boys
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/fbi-warns-teen-boys-increasingly-targeted-in-online-sextortion-schemes
GIST	<p>The FBI is warning parents that teen boys are increasingly being targeted in online "sextortion" schemes.</p> <p>FBI Boston Division's Child Exploitation-Human Trafficking Task Force warned parents and caregivers on Wednesday about an increasing number of reports of adults posing as young girls who coerce young boys through social media to produce sexual images and videos and then extort them for money.</p> <p>In the so-called "sextortion" schemes that have recently become more prevalent, adult predators pretending to be young girls contact young males usually between the ages of 14 and 17 online over any platform used to meet and communicate, such as a game, app or social media accounts. They then use "deception and manipulation" to convince the young males to engage in explicit activity over video, which is then secretly recorded by the predator, the FBI says. The predator then reveals they have made the recording and threatens that those videos will be posted online if the victim doesn't pay up.</p> <p>In 2021, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) received over 18,000 sextortion-related complaints, with losses over \$13.6 million. That figure reflects all types of sextortion reported, not just the scheme targeting teenage boys.</p>

The FBI notes that the embarrassment children feel from falling victim to these schemes often prevents them from coming forward to a parent, teacher, caregiver or law enforcement, so sextortion offenders could have hundreds of undiscovered victims around the world. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to have conversations with their children early on regarding their online activity.

"Predators who ask for sexually explicit photos, videos and then money to terrorize young victims with threats of posting their images online are incredibly disturbing, and on our radar," Joseph R. Bonavolonta, special agent in charge of the FBI Boston Division, said in a statement.

"In order to spare children of the shame, fear and confusion they feel when this happens, we're asking parents and caregivers to talk to their children now about their online safety, and the importance of speaking up to prevent further victimization," he continued. "Meanwhile, the special agents and officers assigned to FBI Boston's Child Exploitation-Human Trafficking Task Force will do everything they can to unmask these criminals and ensure they face justice for the mental anguish and pain they have imposed on their victims and their families."

The FBI listed tips for parents and caregivers, including to be selective about what you share online, especially your personal information and passwords. Social media accounts left open to the public can allow predators to figure out a lot of information about parents of their children. The FBI warns to be suspicious of anyone met online through a game or app, especially if they ask to move conversations to the different platform. Investigators say to be aware that people can pretend to be anything or anyone online and videos and photos are not proof that a person is who they claim to be.

"Sextortion is a crime," the FBI said. "The coercion of a child by an adult to produce what is considered Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) carries heavy penalties, which can include up to life sentences for the offender."

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HEADLINE	04/29 Bitcoin remains in the \$40,000 range
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/markets/bitcoin-4-29-2022
GIST	<p>Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are giving back gains Friday morning.</p> <p>It was a good week for bitcoin with gains in three of the past four days, adding more than 4% in the past two days.</p> <p>Bitcoin remains down more than 12% month-to-date and off more than 13% year-to-date.</p> <p>Labor Department officials had some criticism for Fidelity Investments' plan to allow investors to put bitcoin in their 401(k) accounts, according to the Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>A senior administrator said the plan risks the retirement security of Americans.</p> <p>"For the average American, the need for retirement savings in their old age is significant," Ali Khawar, acting assistant secretary of the Employee Benefits Security Administration, told the Journal. "We are not talking about millionaires and billionaires that have a ton of other assets to draw down."</p> <p>His group works inside the Labor Department to regulate company-sponsored retirement plans.</p> <p>In an April 26 disclosure, Fidelity said that starting later this year, workers could allocate as much as 20% of their nest eggs to bitcoin. That threshold could be reduced by employers.</p> <p>Fidelity responded by saying that its bitcoin offering "represents the firm's continued commitment to evolving and broadening its digital assets offerings amidst steadily growing demand for digital assets across investor segments, and we believe that this technology and digital assets will represent a large part of the financial industry's future."</p>

	Fidelity said this week that the offering would be limited to bitcoin initially, but other digital assets will be made available in the future.
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/28 Pakistani militants test Taliban promise
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistani-militants-test-taliban-promise-not-to-host-terror-groups-11651150686
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD, Pakistan—The Taliban’s commitment to prevent Afghan soil being used by terrorists against other countries is being tested, not by al Qaeda, but by Pakistani militants who have unleashed dozens of attacks in neighboring Pakistan in recent months.</p> <p>The Taliban not only sees many fellow jihadists as brothers and guests, they want to avoid driving new recruits to their sole remaining adversary in Afghanistan, the local branch of the Islamic State militant group.</p> <p>Pakistani militants, based in eastern Afghanistan, have increased attacks in Pakistan since the Taliban’s takeover in August. They have also acquired American military equipment, from the huge stores of weaponry left as U.S. troops departed last year.</p> <p>Pakistan, which is considered the Taliban’s closest ally, has pushed Afghanistan’s new rulers for months to end the threat from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, a group of Pakistani militants who have worked closely with al Qaeda. Islamabad’s patience appears to be wearing thin. The country carried out airstrikes inside Afghanistan earlier this month, according to the Taliban and local Afghan residents. The Taliban called in the Pakistani ambassador in Kabul to register a formal protest over the strikes.</p> <p>“We are facing no resistance or opposition from the Afghan Taliban,” Noor Wali Mehsud, leader of the TTP, wrote in response to questions from The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>One of the few commitments extracted from the Taliban by American officials in a U.S. withdrawal agreement signed in 2020, was a pledge that they wouldn’t allow Afghan territory to be used for terrorism directed abroad. The Taliban, who are seeking international recognition for their regime, deny that Afghan soil is being used against other nations.</p> <p>China, Iran, Russia, and other countries in Afghanistan’s region have all expressed concern that the country could once again be a haven for international jihadists. There are Chinese and central Asian jihadists in Afghanistan, including Uzbek and Tajik militants. Last year, according to Islamabad, TTP militants based in Afghanistan carried out a bombing that killed nine Chinese engineers working on a dam project in Pakistan.</p> <p>A United Nations report in February said some of al Qaeda’s “closest sympathizers” within the Taliban now occupy senior positions in the new administration. It estimated the size of the TTP presence in Afghanistan at between 3,000 and 5,500 fighters, which would make it the biggest foreign jihadist group there.</p> <p>“There are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country. On the contrary, terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom there than at any time in recent history,” the report said.</p> <p>When the Taliban seized power, they released thousands of prisoners, including militants who swelled the ranks of the TTP and Islamic State.</p>

Afghanistan was a sanctuary for Osama bin Laden at the time of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Just as the Taliban then said that their culture and religion didn't permit them to hand over bin Laden, some Taliban commanders now say that they should protect Pakistani and other foreign jihadists.

Pakistani militants gave the Taliban shelter in Pakistan after they were driven out of Afghanistan by the 2001 U.S. invasion of the country. They fought together against the then American-backed regime in Kabul. Now the favor is being repaid.

The Taliban have taken on their jihadist rival, the local branch of Islamic State, which [is carrying out a brutal campaign of attacks](#) inside Afghanistan. Many Islamic State fighters came from the TTP, and taking action against the Pakistani militants could spur more to join Islamic State in opposition to the Taliban.

The U.S. commander who oversees the region that includes Afghanistan, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, said in March that, even though the Taliban are pressuring Islamic State, the branch of the group could establish an attack capability against the U.S. and allies in 12 to 18 months. Against al Qaeda, he said the Taliban are "much less firm."

Instead of military action, the Taliban brokered talks between the TTP and Pakistani authorities, negotiations that led to the release of dozens of TTP prisoners in Pakistan and a monthlong cease-fire in November. Those negotiations broke down in February, however.

The TTP fighters, along with their families, are in areas of Afghanistan controlled by the part of the Taliban considered closest to Pakistan, the Haqqani network, whose leader is Afghanistan's current interior minister.

Washington accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban as its proxy for the two decades that U.S. soldiers were in Afghanistan. During those years, Islamabad in turn alleged that the former U.S.-backed Kabul government was allowing Pakistani militants to operate in Afghanistan. Yet now that the Taliban are in power, Pakistani militants have greater freedom.

Video and pictures released by the TTP show its fighters using American guns, night-vision and thermal-imaging equipment. One video shows a long-range sniper rifle with a night-vision scope, purportedly being used to pick off Pakistani soldiers. They have been shooting some Pakistani soldiers at night without even crossing the border. A picture of the TTP's leader, which was sent to The Wall Street Journal by the group, shows two guards with him holding American M4 rifles. The TTP has also released videos showing them traveling in large motorcades, openly, in what appears to be Afghanistan.

The TTP was formed in reaction to Pakistan's alliance with the U.S. in the "war on terror" after the Sept. 11 attacks. The group, which wants to see strict Islamic law imposed in Pakistan, was responsible for the 2007 assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. In 2012, the TTP shot a young campaigner for educating girls, Malala Yousafzai, who survived and went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

The TTP has been so violent, hitting mosques and religious minorities in Pakistan repeatedly, that at one point, bin Laden wrote to its leadership asking them to rein in the civilian bloodshed as it was giving jihad a bad name, according to a letter found by U.S. forces in 2011 at the former al Qaeda leader's hideout in Pakistan. Under its current leadership, the TTP is focused on attacking Pakistani soldiers and policemen.

Pakistan's two airstrikes on April 16, in the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar and Khost, killed at least 40 people, including some civilians, according to local residents. The U.N. said that 20 children were among the dead. Pakistan hasn't confirmed that it carried out the airstrikes and declined to comment on the civilian deaths, but said earlier this month that "terrorists are using Afghan soil with impunity to carry out activities inside Pakistan."

"If we tolerated the incident, it would have been due to our national interests. We might not have the same tolerance next time," Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob, the Taliban's defense minister and son of the movement's founder, said Sunday.

	<p>The airstrike in Kunar targeted a militant whom Pakistan suspects of leading an attack on April 12 near the Afghan border in South Waziristan, in which a Pakistani major and a soldier were killed. But locals said the airstrike hit the family of the militant, Umar Bajauri. He wasn't with them at the time and survived, they said.</p> <p>In Khost, the airstrike targeted the Gul Bahadur faction, which Pakistan suspects carried out an April 14 ambush of a military convoy, also near the Afghan border in North Waziristan. That attack killed seven Pakistani soldiers.</p> <p>"If Pakistan is unable to get the Taliban to comply on restraining terrorists, other countries with limited leverage are likely to struggle even more," said Asfandiyar Mir, senior expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a think tank in Washington.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Canadian guilty plea: traveled, joined ISIS
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/canadian-traveled-syria-join-pleads-guilty-84382683
GIST	<p>CALGARY, Canada -- A Calgary man who traveled to Syria to join the militant group Islamic State pleaded guilty Thursday to terrorism-related activities.</p> <p>Hussein Borhot, 36, pleaded guilty to one count of participating in terrorism group activity between May 9 and June 7, 2014, and the commission of the offence of kidnapping for a terrorist group while in Syria.</p> <p>RCMP arrested him in July 2020 after a seven-year investigation which also involved the FBI and U.S. Department of Defense.</p> <p>An agreed statement of facts says Borhot traveled to Syria through Turkey to join the Islamic State. He signed up as a fighter, received substantial training and excelled as a sniper.</p> <p>He did not tell his wife about the trip, said the document.</p> <p>Court heard that Borhot revealed much of the information to an undercover officer after he returned to Canada.</p> <p>Borhot told the officer that he and some other Islamic State fighters traveled to a village, where they kidnapped a number of opposing fighters, said the document.</p> <p>He also said he had sworn an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State and expressed a desire to return and fight in Syria.</p> <p>Court of Queen's Bench Justice David Labrenz accepted the pleas and adjourned the case to next month for a sentencing hearing.</p> <p>The maximum sentence on the second offence is life in prison.</p> <p>Borhot remains on bail with strict conditions, including wearing ankle-tracking devices, not applying for travel documents, and heeding a ban on having firearms, ammunition or explosives.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Nigeria: train hostage photos released
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61250213
GIST	<p>Photos have been released of 62 people allegedly being held hostage in Nigeria after a brazen attack by gunmen on a high-speed train last month.</p>

It is not clear when the pictures, which surfaced on social media on Tuesday showing the captives divided into four groups, were taken.

Families of some of those missing after the attack told the BBC they recognised their relatives amongst the hostages.

They give the first indication of how many people are being held.

"I feel such emotion. I cried a lot when I saw the pictures," someone whose brother and sister-in-law are among the hostages told the BBC. He asked not to be identified and said it was a traumatising time for the family.

Gunmen mined the vital rail link between the capital, Abuja, and the northern city of Kaduna on the evening of 28 March, forcing the train carrying 362 passengers to stop.

At least nine passengers died during the attack and some 168 people were reported missing afterwards by the state rail company.

But it has never been clear whether all of them were kidnapped or if some had managed to return home without telling the authorities.

Although the photos have not been independently verified, they provide the first indication of how many people may have been kidnapped in the attack.

The train came under gunfire as the attackers apparently surrounded the train.

Earlier, two proof-of-life videos were released - one showed a bank executive, flanked by armed men in fatigues. He has subsequently been freed.

A second video, which sources suggest was recorded not long after the kidnapping, showed hostages in the bush with armed men in the background - some giving their names and other details.

In the four photos circulating this week, the captives appear seated on cloths with other sheets draped in the background. They are divided into groups of men and women - with 39 men in three photos and 18 women and five children in another.

Another man who recognised his brother in one of the photos told the BBC his sibling had "lost so much weight and his skin has darkened".

Although this suggested the hostages were not being well fed, he said the family was relieved to see him alive.

"Our relatives are captives of bandits while we are captives of hope," he said.

"My brother's little children always ask of their father, but we only tell them he will be back soon."

'No ransom demands'

The authorities say a faction of the Boko Haram jihadist group teamed up with Nigeria's notorious criminal kidnapping gangs to attack the train.

The Islamist insurgents tend to operate in the north-east, with the sophisticated kidnappers, known locally as bandits, operating mainly across the north-west.

When the banker was free about 10 days after the train attack, the kidnappers said in a video that they had taken pity on him because of his age, but there have been reports that a ransom was paid.

	<p>However, in the video one gunmen told the government it was not about ransoms: "What we need is not your money. You know our demands."</p> <p>Analysts suggest they might be seeking a prisoner exchange for their colleagues arrested by the security forces.</p> <p>Relatives of some of the captives have expressed their despair over the situation, telling the BBC officials have not even contacted them directly and all their news comes via the media.</p> <p>Last week, the president lambasted his security forces, ordering them to put more effort into finding the abductees.</p> <p>Kidnapping for ransom has become commonplace across Nigeria. Last week, a report by security research and intelligence firm Beacon Consulting Ltd said that in the first three months of this year, more than 3,500 people had been killed and many more kidnapped by armed groups in Nigeria.</p> <p>The Abuja-Kaduna highway is one of the most dangerous roads in the country, and had pushed commuters on to the railway, which opened in 2016.</p> <p>It has been announced that military aircraft will escort the trains once repair work on the 190km (120-mile) track is completed. It is not known exactly when services will resume.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Explosions north Afghanistan kill 9
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-religion-race-and-ethnicity-bombings-taliban-39537492e9cc4d9e6f5aa215f1f18892
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Two explosions, within minutes of each other, killed at least nine people and wounded 13 in northern Afghanistan on Thursday, a spokesman for a Taliban-appointed police chief said.</p> <p>The blasts targeted two separate vehicles in Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province, according to Mohammad Asif Waziri, the spokesman.</p> <p>The source of the blasts was not immediately clear and the spokesman provided no further details. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. Taliban security cordoned off the area.</p> <p>Residents in the area said members of the Shiite minority Hazara ethnic group appeared to be the target. They spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their safety.</p> <p>The attacks are the latest in a series of deadly bombings to rattle Afghanistan. Last week, 33 Shiite worshippers were killed when a bomb ripped through a mosque and an adjacent religious building school.</p> <p>The Islamic State group's regional affiliate — a top foe of Afghanistan's new Taliban rulers — claimed responsibility for that bombing.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/29 National Hairball Awareness Day
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Odd_News/2022/04/29/National-Hairball-Awareness-Day-started-by-Kansas-veterinarian/1741651180848/
GIST	April 29 (UPI) -- Hairball Awareness Day, celebrated annually on the last Friday in April, was started by a veterinarian to encourage cat owners to take steps to prevent their pets from coughing up hairballs.

	<p>The holiday was founded by Dr. Blake Hawly, a Kansas-based veterinarian and pet nutrition expert who created the day to help cat owners understand the reasons why their cats cough up hairballs -- also known as trichobezoars -- and how they can minimize the occurrences.</p> <p>Hairballs are caused when cats ingest their own hair while self-grooming. The hair gathers into digestive obstructions, causing the felines to vomit them out.</p> <p>Other holidays and observances for April 29 include Childcare Professionals Day, International Dance Day, International Noise Awareness Day, National Shrimp Scampi Day, Viral Video Day, We Jump The World Day and Zipper Day.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Global warming risks cataclysmic extinction
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/28/global-warming-risks-cataclysmic-mass-extinction-marine-life
GIST	<p>Global heating is causing such a drastic change to the world's oceans that it risks a mass extinction event of marine species that rivals anything that's happened in the Earth's history over tens of millions of years, new research has warned.</p> <p>Accelerating climate change is causing a "profound" impact upon ocean ecosystems that is "driving extinction risk higher and marine biological richness lower than has been seen in Earth's history for the past tens of millions of years", according to the study.</p> <p>The world's seawater is steadily climbing in temperature due to the extra heat produced from the burning of fossil fuels, while oxygen levels in the ocean are plunging and the water is acidifying from the soaking up of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.</p> <p>This means the oceans are overheated, increasingly gasping for breath – the volume of ocean waters completely depleted of oxygen has quadrupled since the 1960s – and becoming more hostile to life. Aquatic creatures such as clams, mussels and shrimp are unable to properly form shells due to the acidification of seawater.</p> <p>All of this means the planet could slip into a "mass extinction rivaling those in Earth's past", states the new research, published in Science. The pressures of rising heat and loss of oxygen are, researchers said, uncomfortably reminiscent of the mass extinction event that occurred at the end of the Permian period about 250m years ago. This cataclysm, known as the "great dying", led to the demise of up to 96% of the planet's marine animals.</p> <p>"Even if the magnitude of species loss is not the same level as this, the mechanism of the species loss would be the same," said Justin Penn, a climate scientist at Princeton University who co-authored the new research.</p> <p>"The future of life in the oceans rests strongly on what we decide to do with greenhouse gases today. There are two vastly different oceans we could be seeing, one devoid of a lot of life we see today, depending on what we see with CO2 emissions moving forward."</p> <p>Truly catastrophic extinction levels may be reached should the world emit planet-heating gases in an unrestrained way, leading to more than 4C of average warming above pre-industrial times by the end of this century, the research found. This would trigger extinctions that would reshape ocean life for several more centuries as temperatures continue to climb.</p> <p>But even in the better case scenarios, the world is still set to lose a significant chunk of its marine life. At 2C of heating above the pre-industrial norm, which is forecast as likely even under current climate pledges</p>

	<p>by the world's governments, around 4% of the roughly two million species in the oceans will be wiped out.</p> <p>Fish and marine mammals that live in polar regions are most vulnerable, according to the study, as they will be unable to migrate to suitably cooler climes, unlike tropical species. "They will just have nowhere to go," said Penn.</p> <p>The threat of climate change is amplifying the other major dangers faced by aquatic life, such as over-fishing and pollution. Between 10% and 15% of marine species are already at risk of extinction because of these various threats, the study found, drawing upon International Union for Conservation of Nature data.</p> <p>John Bruno, a marine ecologist at the University of North Carolina who was not involved in the study, said the new research appeared "sound" but it differed from previous studies on the topic that suggest species will mainly disperse to new areas rather than be completely snuffed out.</p> <p>"It's very different from what most prior work has developed. But that doesn't mean they are wrong," Bruno said. "I think this new work is challenging some of our current assumptions about the geographic patterns of looming extinction in the ocean."</p> <p>Bruno said that while mass extinctions are likely from extreme heating in the future, the current impacts from climate change and other threats should be concerning enough for policymakers and the public.</p> <p>"Personally, I'm a lot more worried about the ecosystem degradation we're already seeing after less than 1C of warming," he said.</p> <p>"We don't need to look to a world so warmed over humanity has been wiped out – we're already losing untold biodiversity and ecosystem functioning with even the relatively modest warming of the last 50 years."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 Family packs unexploded bomb as souvenir
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/panic-at-israeli-airport-as-us-family-packs-unexploded-bombshell-for-flight-home
GIST	<p>An American family set off a bomb scare at Israel's main airport when they showed security inspectors an unexploded shell that they found while visiting the Golan Heights and had packed for their return trip, authorities said.</p> <p>Video circulated on social media showed panicked passengers scattering at Ben Gurion Airport's departure hall near Tel Aviv on Thursday.</p> <p>The Israel Airports Authority said a man was hospitalised with injuries sustained as he tried to flee over a baggage carousel.</p> <p>The Jewish Press reported that during the family's Golan Heights trip one of the children found and took a bombshell they were planning to take home as a souvenir. When it was shown at the airport's luggage check-in, security called for an evacuation of the area.</p> <p>The airports authority said the family was allowed to board their flight after an interrogation by security staff, who declared an all-clear.</p> <p>Israel, which has high levels of aviation security, clashed with Syria over the Golan during the wars of 1967 and 1973.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 La Niña could enter rare third straight year
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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/04/27/la-nina-triple-hurricanes-tornadoes/
GIST	<p>Meteorologists are monitoring the potential for a “triple-dip La Niña,” an unusual resurgence of cooler-than-normal sea surface temperatures in the eastern tropical Pacific. While such a phenomenon might seem remote, La Niña plays an enormous role in our weather stateside.</p> <p>In addition to helping juice up tornado season in the spring, La Niña has been known to supercharge Atlantic hurricane season when it sticks around into the summer and fall.</p> <p>La Niña is the opposite of El Niño, which are both sides of the coin that make up ENSO, or the El Niño Southern Oscillation. El Niño represents ENSO’s positive “warm” phase, while La Niña is the opposite. The effects of the different phases are wide-reaching and significant, with implications on the weather experienced all across the globe.</p> <p>Where we’re at now</p> <p>La Niña and El Niño typically flip back and forth every one to three years, with some swings of the pendulum more dramatic than others. Most of late 2019 into the first half of 2020 was “ENSO neutral,” or somewhere in between El Niño and La Niña. Then a La Niña started to emerge during the end of summer in 2020, overlapping with the height of a record-breaking hurricane season. Thirty named storms spun up across the Atlantic that season, including a record seven major hurricanes.</p> <p>After persisting through spring 2021, La Niña took a breather last summer and returned to an ENSO-neutral state before the needle dipped back into the La Niña category in the fall. The 2021 Atlantic hurricane season produced 21 named storms, third most on record.</p> <p>La Niña persisted through the winter and is still going strong. March proved the most active on record for tornadoes across the Lower 48.</p> <p>What’s next</p> <p>Looking ahead, NOAA is maintaining a La Niña advisory, writing on April 25 that “the tropical Pacific atmosphere is consistent with La Niña.”</p> <p>They say that La Niña is favored to continue through the summer, with 59 percent odds of remaining into July, August and September. There are 50-55 percent odds of La Niña persisting into the fall.</p> <p>The past two winters have featured La Niña conditions, and it’s not impossible that we could be gunning for a third. It’s particularly rare to have an ongoing La Niña three winters in a row. They’re referred to as “triple dip” La Niñas.</p> <p>Since bookkeeping began in 1950, there have been eight “double-dip” La Niñas, including the present. Only two ended up evolving to have a third consecutive La Niña winter. If La Niña does stick around into the late autumn, the possibility of a triple dip La Niña will grow.</p> <p>What La Niña means for the weather</p> <p>There is evidence to suggest that La Niña patterns bolster the risk of severe weather across parts of the South and the southern Plains during tornado season, which peaks in April and May. The bull’s eye of greatest enhancement has historically been centered in Arkansas, though the risk expands across a much broader region.</p> <p>Part of that stems from the jet stream pattern — the high-altitude river of wind slices across the country west to east, allowing hot and dry weather to crop up in southern areas while cool Canadian air sags south to the north of the jet. In between, the seasons wage war, the resulting clash helping spark thunderstorms. The jet stream simultaneously imparts wind shear, or a change of wind speed and/or direction with height, which helps the storms to rotate.</p> <p>La Niña could also be a concern in the upcoming hurricane season, which is already projected to be above average. That’s because La Niña patterns are characterized by a subtle weakening of upper-level winds in</p>

the tropics. That effectively *reduces* wind shear, which facilitates the formation of hurricanes. Too much shear can play a game of tug-of-war with a fledgling disturbance, shredding it apart before it can mature into a named system. An absence of that will help more “seeds” to grow into storms.

La Niña also influences the Walker circulation, or a west to east overturning circulation in the equatorial and tropical ocean. Rising or sinking motion in one stretch of the atmosphere must be balanced by the opposite elsewhere. Because La Niña features cool waters in the eastern Pacific, the adjacent air mass in contact is chilled too, resulting in cool air that sinks.

That descent allows air over the Atlantic, which is comparatively buoyant thanks to warmer waters, to rise. In turn, that upward motion spurs more storminess.

There’s no way to know for sure if La Niña will still be as intense at that point — or even around at all — but experts are already sounding the alarms for an active hurricane season. Researchers at Colorado State University expect the season to wind up about 130 percent as active as normal, rivaling or exceeding last year’s above-average season.

Long-range implications into the fall and winter

If La Niña manages to hold on through the fall and into next year, becoming a true “triple dip” event, it could have the following additional effects:

- Worsening [drought conditions in the Southwest](#) and elevating the fire danger since La Niñas tend to result in reduced precipitation in the region
- Raising the odds of a relatively cold, stormy winter across the northern tier of the United States and a mild, dry winter across the South, not unlike this past winter

But looking ahead this far is pretty speculative because computer models are challenged to make accurate ENSO forecasts at this time of year; forecasters refer to this as [the spring predictability barrier](#).

Global temperature implications

The presence of La Niña and cooler-than-normal ocean waters in the tropical Pacific have helped somewhat lower the average global temperature over the last year or two. [2021 tied as the Earth’s sixth-hottest year on record](#). If it weren’t for La Niña, the year’s warmth almost certainly would’ve ranked higher.

The first three months of 2022 ranked fifth warmest on record, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It says 2022 [has just a 4.2 percent chance](#) to rank as the warmest year, which is largely due to the La Niña influence. Once El Niño returns, the chances of a record-breaking warm year will increase.

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HEADLINE	04/28 WA largest tuberculosis outbreak in 20yrs
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/tuberculosis-cases-on-the-rise-in-wa-with-one-outbreak-connected-to-state-prisons/
GIST	<p>Washington’s largest tuberculosis outbreak in two decades is connected to at least one state prison, as cases rise in other parts of the region, the state Department of Health announced Thursday afternoon.</p> <p>The state’s rise in cases mirrors a similar trend throughout the world, DOH said in a statement. To date, Washington has recorded about 70 TB cases, 17 of which are part of the same outbreak — and are connected to at least one Washington prison, the statement said.</p> <p>“It’s been 20 years since we saw a cluster of TB cases like this,” Dr. Tao Kwan-Gett, the state’s chief science officer, said in the statement. “The pandemic has likely contributed to the rise in cases and the outbreak in at least one correctional facility.”</p>

	<p>DOH pointed to “widespread disruptions” in health care systems and missed diagnoses — COVID-19 and TB have similar symptoms — as two main reasons cases have increased locally and globally.</p> <p>Kwan-Gett noted that increased access to testing and treatment will likely be “key” in curbing spread.</p> <p>The state Department of Corrections is testing staff and incarcerated people at Stafford Creek Corrections Center, where at least some cases were found, Dr. MaryAnn Curl, the agency’s chief medical officer, said in the statement.</p> <p>DOC did not respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Tuberculosis cases in Washington “notably” rose at the beginning of 2021, which saw 199 cases, reflecting a 22% increase since 2020.</p> <p>The World Health Organization also confirmed last fall that TB deaths had risen for the first time in more than a decade, largely because medical resources were being diverted to fight the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The disease spreads through the air, though “unlike COVID-19, more prolonged exposure to someone with TB disease is typically necessary for infection to occur,” the statement said.</p> <p>Symptoms generally include coughing, chest pain, fever, night sweats, weight loss and tiredness. Treatment usually takes at least six months.</p> <p>No further information was available about the recent cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Lake Mead falls to unprecedented low
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/27/us/water-intake-exposed-lake-mead-drought-climate/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)The West is in the grips of a climate change-fueled megadrought, and Lake Mead -- the largest manmade reservoir in the country and a source of water for millions of people -- has fallen to an unprecedented low.</p> <p>The lake's plummeting water level has exposed one of the reservoir's original water intake valves for the first time, officials say.</p> <p>The valve had been in service since 1971 but can no longer draw water, according to the Southern Nevada Water Authority, which is responsible for managing water resources for 2.2 million people in Southern Nevada, including Las Vegas.</p> <p>Across the West, extreme drought is already taking a toll this year and summertime heat hasn't even arrived yet. Drought conditions worsened in the Southwest over the past week, the US Drought Monitor reported Thursday. Extreme and exceptional drought, the two worst designations, expanded across New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado -- all states that are part of the Colorado River basin.</p> <p>New Mexico's drought has been steadily intensifying since the beginning of the year, and extreme or exceptional drought now covers 68% of the state.</p> <p>Further West, water officials in Southern California are now demanding that residents and businesses limit outdoor watering to one day a week, after a disappointing winter with very little rain and snow. It's the first time they've implemented such a strict rule.</p> <p>"This is a crisis. This is unprecedented," said Adel Hagekhalil, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. "We have never done anything like this before and because we haven't seen this situation happen like this before. We don't have enough water to meet normal demands for the six million people living in the State Water Project dependent areas."</p>

At Lake Mead, photos taken Monday show the eldest of the agency's three intake valves high and dry above the water line.

"When the lake hit 1060 (feet above sea level), that's when you could start to see the top of the intake number one," said Bronson Mack, public outreach officer for the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

Lake Mead hit 1,060 feet above sea level on April 4 and stands at 1055 feet as of Wednesday, he said.

As a result, the water authority has begun operating new, low-lake pumping station for the first time -- a valve situated deeper at the bottom of Lake Mead. The station, which began construction in 2015 and was completed in 2020, is capable of delivering water with the lake at a much lower level, and was built to protect the region's water resource in light of worsening drought.

"There was no impact to operation's ability to deliver water," Mack said. "Customers didn't notice anything. It was a seamless transition."

Water flowing down the Colorado River fills Lake Mead and Lake Powell -- another critical reservoir in the West -- and the river system supports more than 40 million people living across seven Western states and Mexico. Both reservoirs provide drinking water and irrigation for many communities across the region, including rural farms, ranches and native communities.

The federal government [declared a water shortage on the Colorado River](#) for the first time last summer. The shortage triggered mandatory water consumption cuts for states in the Southwest, which began in January.

And in March, [Lake Powell dropped below](#) a critical threshold that threatens the Glen Canyon Dam's ability to generate power.

The West is in its worst drought in centuries, scientists reported Monday. A study published in February found the period from 2000 to 2021 was the driest in for the region 1,200 years.

The human-caused climate crisis has made the West's megadrought 72% worse, the study noted.

"We're kind of in some uncharted territory, socially and economically," Justin Mankin, assistant professor of geography at Dartmouth College and co-lead of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Drought Task Force, told CNN in March.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Climate change impact infectious diseases
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/climate-change-increase-risk-infectious-diseases-84365168
GIST	<p>Climate change will result in thousands of new viruses spread among animal species by 2070 — and that's likely to increase the risk of emerging infectious diseases jumping from animals to humans, according to a new study.</p> <p>This is especially true for Africa and Asia, continents that have been hotspots for deadly disease spread from humans to animals or vice versa over the last several decades, including the flu, HIV, Ebola and coronavirus.</p> <p>Researchers, who published their findings Thursday in the journal Nature, used a model to examine how over 3,000 mammal species might migrate and share viruses over the next 50 years if the world warms by 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), which recent research shows is possible.</p>

They found that cross-species virus spread will happen over 4,000 times among mammals alone. Birds and marine animals weren't included in the study.

Researchers said not all viruses will spread to humans or become pandemics the scale of the coronavirus but the number of cross-species viruses increases the risk of spread to humans.

The study highlights two global crises — climate change and infectious disease spread — as the world grapples with what to do about both.

Previous research has looked at how deforestation and extinction and wildlife trade lead to animal-human disease spread, but there's less research about how climate change could influence this type of disease transmission, the researchers said at a media briefing Wednesday.

"We don't talk about climate a lot in the context of zoonoses" — diseases that can spread from animals to people, said study co-author Colin Carlson, an assistant professor of biology at Georgetown University. "Our study ... brings together the two most pressing global crises we have."

Experts on climate change and infectious disease agreed that a warming planet will likely lead to increased risk for the emergence of new viruses.

Daniel R. Brooks, a biologist at University of Nebraska State Museum and co-author of the book "The Stockholm Paradigm: Climate Change and Emerging Disease," said the study acknowledges the threat posed by climate change in terms of increasing risk of infectious diseases.

"This particular contribution is an extremely conservative estimate for potential" emerging infectious disease spread caused by climate change, said Brooks.

Aaron Bernstein, a pediatrician and interim director of The Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said the study confirms long-held suspicions about the impact of warming on infectious disease emergence.

"Of particular note is that the study indicates that these encounters may already be happening with greater frequency and in places near where many people live," Bernstein said.

Study co-author Gregory Albery, a disease ecologist at Georgetown University, said that because climate-driven infectious disease emergence is likely already happening, the world should be doing more to learn about and prepare for it.

"It is not preventable, even in the best case climate change scenarios," Albery said.

Carlson, who was also an author on the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said we must cut greenhouse gas and phase out fossil fuels to reduce the risk of infectious disease spread.

Jaron Browne, organizing director of the climate justice group Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, said the study highlights climate injustices experienced by people living in African and Asian nations.

"African and Asian nations face the greatest threat of increased virus exposure, once again illustrating how those on the frontlines of the crisis have very often done the least to create climate change," Browne said.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Officials: clusters of severe hepatitis in kids
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/clusters-severe-hepatitis-cases-children-investigated/story?id=84379149
GIST	U.S. and global health officials are sounding the alarm about an increasing number of mysterious cases of severe hepatitis occurring among children .

Earlier this month, researchers in the United States and Europe announced they were investigating small clusters of the cases emerging across the globe. Soon after, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released an alert to doctors and providers to be on the lookout for the unusual cases.

Globally, around 170 cases have been identified, according to World Health Organization officials, with many of the children under the age of 10.

“What is particularly unusual is that the majority of these children were previously healthy,” Dr. Philippa Easterbrook, a medical expert with the WHO's Global HIV Hepatitis and STI Programme, said during a press conference on Thursday.

The causal agent of these cases of acute hepatitis, or liver inflammation, in children, remains unknown. Experts say hepatitis is often caused by an infection, but not always.

In an effort to identify what may be driving the outbreaks, the WHO has initiated a full investigation, encouraging countries to report concerning cases, with their scientists hoping to find any potential connection.

Domestically, Alabama, Delaware, Illinois, New York, North Carolina and Wisconsin confirmed to ABC News that a total of more than 20 cases of severe hepatitis have been identified in the U.S.

At least four children in the U.S. have required a liver transplant.

On Wednesday, officials from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services issued a health alert over concerns over the discovery of a recent cluster of cases in children of acute hepatitis. Of the four cases identified, two children developed severe outcomes, including one child who required a liver transplant, and one child who died.

Likewise, at the University of Alabama Hospital at Birmingham, physicians have been investigating a concerning uptick in the number of children infected with severe acute hepatitis since the fall.

"What caught our attention, from the beginning, was that all of these cases were testing positive for adenovirus," Dr. Helena Gutierrez, medical director of the UAB and Children's of Alabama Pediatric Liver Transplant Program, told ABC News on Thursday, adding that officials were also alarmed by the severity of the cases.

Nine patients with pediatric hepatitis in Alabama have been shown to be positive for the adenovirus-41 strain through blood work, two of whom have required liver transplants, according to state officials. However, an official correlation has yet to be confirmed.

The majority of these children, mostly under the age of 10, and many of them under the age of 5, came to the hospital with similar symptoms — diarrhea and vomiting, which subsequently led to dehydration, according to Gutierrez. These initial symptoms were followed by jaundice, with the skin turning yellow, and then the sclera, or white, of the eyes subsequently turning yellow.

Experts say these outbreaks are very “unusual”, and there is likely a confluence of factors behind the rise in severe cases.

“These unexplained cases of hepatitis have always existed, but at a very low level, where the standard tests have been done, and there's no clear cause. And these happen at a very low level in most countries,” Easterbrook said.

WHO officials reported that one of the “leading threads of investigation” is the potential connection to the adenovirus. However, a direct link has yet to be made.

“At the end, most likely, this is all going to be multifactorial, it could be a virus that's driving it, plus an exaggerated response from these patients to try to combat these viruses,” Gutierrez said. “Knowing that there are different centers that are seeing more of these cases, it is definitely rare, and it's not the norm.”

With a hepatitis outbreak, physicians often look for infectious and non-infectious causes to explain the uptick in disease, according to WHO officials. Thus far, none of the common hepatitis viruses (A, B, C, E) can be traced to this outbreak, and there have been no other known potential exposures to drugs, environmental agents, or toxins.

The emergence of these clusters of severe hepatitis among children comes after many children have been forced to stay inside and distance themselves from social activities, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One hypothesis, that the outbreak could potentially be linked to a lack of exposure to other germs, is one that health experts are investigating, Gutierrez said.

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the circulation of other viruses, and now that life is getting back to normal, officials have seen an increase in adenovirus.

It is still unclear what role COVID-19 is playing in this outbreak, according to Dr. Richard Peabody, who leads WHO Europe's high-threat pathogens team. It could “potentially” be playing a role, but any link “really needs further investigation to understand whether [COVID-19] might be a factor.”

There is also no evidence, at this time, that vaccination against COVID-19 is related to the outbreaks, as the majority of the children were unvaccinated.

When asked what parents could do to protect their kids, given the lack of information pertaining to the causal agent for the hepatitis infection, Gutierrez said that parents should not be alarmed, given that kids get sick routinely, and if they developed symptoms such as diarrhea and vomiting, it is critical to keep them hydrated.

However, she urged parents to seek medical attention if the children developed symptoms that are not normal.

If symptoms “continue to be an issue, and hydration is a problem, just like any other type of illness, just go to your pediatrician, but especially if you see that your kid starts to have skin that's turning yellow, or the white of their eyes turning yellow, or urine that's very dark in color,” Gutierrez said.

Such symptoms should be brought up to the attention of the pediatrician, so that the child can be assessed, and to determine if care should be escalated.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/29 China aggressive efforts to get fugitives
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/29/china-deportation-cyprus-uyghur/
GIST	<p>When Liu Lingshuang, a Chinese national living on the Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus, went to renew the passports of her two children, the embassy rejected her request because their father was a wanted man in China.</p> <p>But if Liu could persuade Ma Chao to come to the embassy and admit to committing a crime, then the renewal might be possible, embassy staff told her. Its offer was recounted by a person familiar with the exchange, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from the Chinese government.</p>

The incident last year — the start of a campaign of threats to press the business executive to give himself up — illustrates what human rights groups warn are authorities’ pervasive and increasingly brazen intimidation tactics to compel fugitives hiding overseas to return to China.

As Beijing’s high-profile hunt for international fugitives escalates, activists and some lawmakers in Europe and North America are raising the alarm about its use of coercive tactics to repatriate people and calling for Western governments to be cautious with requests to send criminal suspects to China to face trial.

Among the reasons they cite for rejecting Beijing’s demands are its misuse of international law enforcement platforms like Interpol as a tool of transnational political repression and its failure to appropriately guarantee a fair trial for those who return.

Within the European Union, some fear that states like Cyprus, one of 10 members that have signed extradition treaties with Beijing, are at risk of being complicit in the international expansion of controversial Chinese policing practices that often ignore human rights safeguards.

Since 2014, China’s issuance of Interpol “red notices” — essentially, requests to police forces around the world to apprehend a suspect and send them to another jurisdiction — has increased dramatically from around 30 a year to more than 200 annually, according to figures published by Chinese media. The notices target not just allegedly corrupt officials and executives but also, according to [reports](#), include political activists and ethnic [Uyghurs](#) or Tibetans who fled Chinese repression in their homelands.

Since 1997, there have been at least 1,574 Uyghurs detained and repatriated from outside China, with 1,364 of those cases taking place since 2014, a [new analysis](#) by the Wilson Center detailed. The report noted that Chinese practices targeting Uyghurs include withholding passports, cyberattacks, intimidation, surveillance, pressure on families, spying through informants and abuse of Interpol and extradition treaties.

Under what China calls a counterterrorism program, at least a million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities have been detained since 2017 in Xinjiang province and subject to political indoctrination, torture and psychological abuse, [according to the State Department](#).

This month, [human rights groups](#) called for Saudi Arabia to halt the planned deportation of four Uyghurs, including a mother and her 13-year-old child, to China. After an outcry, the repatriation was delayed.

“These individuals remain at great risk,” said Omer Kanat, executive director of the Uyghur Human Rights Project. If deported, “there is zero doubt they will be detained indefinitely, and subject to brutality and torture.”

China’s Foreign Ministry consistently denies allegations of human rights abuses in its legal system and defends the country’s transnational policing campaigns as being carried out in accordance with Chinese and international law. However, a 2018 report from the graft-busting [China’s Central Commission for Discipline Inspection](#) championed the use of “irregular methods” to repatriate those wanted abroad.

Those methods, as described in the since-deleted report, include kidnapping and entrapment where Chinese law enforcement might lure suspects onto the high seas, international airspace or into a country with an extradition treaty.

Even for apparently nonpolitical cases like Ma’s in Cyprus, activists contend that off-the-books techniques of harassment have become more common. They say the default assumption should be to reject Chinese extradition requests.

“This is not an isolated case, but rather the blueprint for an intricate part of China’s growing transnational repression,” the human rights organization Safeguard Defenders wrote in a report about the case.

Previously high-profile cases include that of Swedish book publisher [Gui Minhai](#), who disappeared in Thailand in 2015 and then reappeared in custody in China, and that of former Chinese official Xu Jin, a New Jersey resident who was [stalked and harassed](#) by Chinese agents after they flew his elderly father to the United States in an effort to persuade him to return to China.

Some recent Chinese extradition efforts have failed. In 2019, the Swedish Supreme Court [declined](#) to extradite a man wanted on suspicion of embezzlement in China because he risked political persecution there.

The pressure campaign targeting Liu in Cyprus began shortly after her partner was detained by authorities there in February 2021 based on a red notice from China. Ma, who is in his 40s, was wanted in China on suspicion of fraudulent fundraising linked to the companies he ran. The government notice cited the Zhouxin Group, a conglomerate with subsidiaries that spanned agriculture, wealth management, property and peer-to-peer lending.

According to Liu's account as told to Safeguard Defenders, which is registered in Spain but focuses on China, Liu continued to appear in court in support of Ma after the embassy refused to renew her children's passports. But that changed in October, when she was approached in the courthouse parking lot by about eight men dressed in suits who had arrived on a minibus from the Chinese Embassy.

The group warned Liu against supporting Ma's legal fight against deportation and set a timeline of three months for him to return to China. If that deadline was missed, they told her, family in China would be arrested. Her account was corroborated by an individual who witnessed the exchange. China's Ministry of Public Security did not respond to requests for comment on the status of the investigation into Ma's case. Since the incident, Liu stopped attending the extradition hearings.

Such "coercion-by-proxy" is regularly deployed by Chinese law enforcement with threats often made against parents, sometimes over instant messaging or photographs taken by police officers, said Bradley Jardine, a global fellow at the Wilson Center's Kissinger Institute on China and the United States and author of the new report on global Uyghur arrests and deportations.

"A lot of the time this is to convey a sense of power and authority over the family members and instill a sense of fear that China uses to deter activists from engaging in speaking with media or in public events," he said.

In late January, as the three-month deadline set by Chinese authorities passed, Liu's sister and brother-in-law, Liu Linghui and Zhang Shourong, were arrested in the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin on suspicion of illegal fundraising, according to images of official detention slips shared by Safeguard Defenders. Liu declined to be interviewed for this article out of fear of further Chinese government actions targeting her family.

China's international dragnet to capture fugitives beyond its borders has expanded rapidly since Chinese President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. Operation [Sky Net](#), which targets officials who have fled the country after being accused of corruption, has snared more than 10,000 individuals since its launch in 2015.

Only 1 percent of those individuals were extradited through official channels. State media accounts said the rest were "persuaded" to give themselves up using the Central Commission's "irregular methods" that could be used as a last resort.

By 2018, China was making headway in its efforts to normalize extradition from Europe. A fugitive facing corruption charges was repatriated from Sweden, despite the lack of a bilateral extradition treaty, and Beijing's [first official graft rendition](#) from a European Union member country was made from Bulgaria.

But as China's diplomatic antagonism with liberal democracies intensified, so has fear in Western capitals that governments may have rushed too quickly into law enforcement cooperation with Beijing. Political

	<p>exiles who fled repression in Hong Kong or Xinjiang have raised the alarm that E.U. member states' extradition treaties implicitly legitimize the internationalization of Chinese law enforcement.</p> <p>The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), an international group of legislators in democratic nations working to change how such countries approach dealings with Beijing, issued “do not extradite” cards to critics of the Chinese state in Europe who considered themselves at risk of being targeted by rendition requests.</p> <p>The imposition of the draconian national security law in Hong Kong in 2020, which criminalizes an array of vaguely worded activities, led to calls for extradition treaties to be suspended or revoked. In the last year, however, the initiatives to scrutinize the treaties have stalled, said Reinhard Bütikofer, co-chair of the European Green Party and of IPAC.</p> <p>“The idea of differentiating between extradition efforts that may look obviously political and others that claim to prosecute financial crimes seems impractical and ill considered,” he said in an interview. China “doesn’t guarantee human rights to any of its citizens; we should not extradite individuals into such an authoritarian system.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Sanctions new priority for Justice Dept.
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/sanctions-turn-into-new-priority-for-justice-department-11651097156?mod=hp_minor_pos11
GIST	<p>The U.S. Justice Department has made sanctions evasion and export-control violations a central focus of its white-collar enforcement program following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The focus should have a profound effect on businesses and their efforts to comply with U.S. laws, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said at a New York City Bar Association event.</p> <p>“The way that multinational companies have to think about how these sanctions regimes are going to be affecting their businesses is critically important, and something we should be having conversations about,” Ms. Monaco said.</p> <p>Bribery has long been the primary focus of federal prosecutors’ corporate investigations. Prosecutors have used the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which prohibits payments by companies to foreign officials, to target large corporations and impose billions of dollars in fines.</p> <p>The Justice Department’s white-collar enforcement efforts increasingly have a national-security focus, Ms. Monaco said Wednesday. “One way to think about this is as sanctions being the new FCPA,” she said to a room of white-collar defense lawyers.</p> <p>Financial institutions often are the first entities to be held responsible for sanctions violations, particularly in situations where they process payments by individuals or companies that violate national security prohibitions. But companies also need to be aware of the rules, including by applying know-your-customer processes to their supply chains, Ms. Monaco said.</p> <p>The Biden administration last year said it was making rooting out corruption a central pillar of its national-security agenda, issuing a directive it said would increase collaboration between government agencies on issues such as kleptocracy and illicit finance.</p> <p>In the wake of the invasion of Ukraine in February, the Justice Department launched an interagency task force dedicated to enforcing sanctions and export-control measures implemented against Russia in response to its military action.</p>

	<p>Andrew Adams, co-chief of the Justice Department's KleptoCapture task force, said the new team would draw on existing department resources to prosecute individuals and companies evading sanctions and to seize assets linked to corrupt Russian oligarchs.</p> <p>"The task force is investigating entrenched, well-funded organized crime," said Mr. Adams, who spoke at a separate session at the same event Wednesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Pipeline: 6 guns shops, 11,000 'crime guns'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/us/politics/gun-shops-weapons-resell.html
GIST	<p>PHILADELPHIA — They look like delis or hardware stores — a corner shop decorated with stuffed Easter bunnies, a nondescript brick building in the shadow of Interstate 95, a storefront so picturesque it was featured in the new M. Night Shyamalan movie.</p> <p>But they are in fact a dozen or so federally licensed firearms dealers operating in Philadelphia, where they have done brisk business in recent years meeting the demand from legal buyers in one of the nation's most violent cities. They are also a major source of weapons used illegally, according to a new report that offers a rare glimpse into the link between legal gun sales and criminal activity.</p> <p>From 2014 to 2020, six small retailers in south and northeast Philadelphia sold more than 11,000 weapons that were later recovered in criminal investigations or confiscated from owners who had obtained them illegally, according to an examination of Pennsylvania firearms tracing data by the gun control group Brady, the most comprehensive analysis of its kind in decades.</p> <p>The report's conclusions confirm what law enforcement officials have long known. A small percentage of gun stores — 1.2 percent of the state's licensed dealers, according to Brady — accounted for 57 percent of firearms that ended up in the hands of criminals through illegal resale or direct purchases by "straw" buyers who turned them over to people barred from owning guns.</p> <p>That finding was in line with a new batch of tracing data obtained by the House Oversight and Reform Committee, which also found that a small number of retailers in Georgia, Indiana, Florida and Michigan were responsible for a high proportion of so-called crime guns traced by law enforcement, according to a letter the committee sent to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives on Thursday.</p> <p>"There is a wide spectrum of behavior we're dealing with when it comes to these stores," T. Christian Heyne, Brady's vice president for policy, said in an interview. "Some of them need support, some need more scrutiny, and some of them just need to be shut down."</p> <p>The vast majority of dealers, Mr. Heyne added, "sell guns safely and often exceed the letter of the law." The purpose of releasing the report, he said, was to pressure federal, state and local officials to focus on countering "the bad actions of a few."</p> <p>The House panel's continuing investigation used data from the A.T.F. to show that "a small number of gun dealers are disproportionately responsible for flooding our streets with guns that are used in crimes," Representative Carolyn B. Maloney, the New York Democrat who is the chairwoman of the committee, said in a statement.</p> <p>A.T.F. officials have long argued against making any inferences from crime-gun data in isolation without knowing the percentage of a store's overall guns end up in the wrong hands. But that information, along with many other details about individual store operations, is not made public.</p> <p>Twenty years ago, the gun lobby pushed an amendment through Congress preventing the A.T.F. from distributing trace data beyond law enforcement agencies. That means even basic numbers are hard to come by. When Ms. Maloney's staff requested granular information about dealers with high numbers of crime gun sales, the A.T.F. refused to identify retailers by name — giving each an anonymized numeric label.</p>

Yet the left, which has had little success in restricting access to semiautomatic weapons or expanding background checks, is making incremental progress in rooting out more of the information.

Last year, President Biden commissioned a large-scale national [gun trafficking report](#) that will include analyses of gun makers and dealers, the first of its kind in two decades. And some local officials, who are not legally constrained from releasing data, have been compiling data from local law enforcement sources.

In 2019, Pennsylvania's attorney general, Josh Shapiro, began posting online trace data from 186,000 crime guns reported to the state by local law enforcement officials dating back to 1977. The database did not include the crimes associated with each trace, or the identity of the dealers. But Brady researchers determined the names of retailers from phone numbers listed on the database.

"I have said for years that most crime guns come from a small number of stores," said Mr. Shapiro, a Democrat who is running for governor. "We need to do more as a state to make it harder for gun sales to lead to gun violence."

But Mr. Shapiro, echoing the A.T.F., cautioned against drawing too many conclusions about individual sellers, adding that "a small percentage" of bad sales at a busy, but otherwise legally compliant, store could show up as dozens of crime guns. He also emphasized that the information, while useful, was incomplete because many local departments did not contribute tracing information.

Larry Keane, a top official with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a firearms industry trade association, went even further, accusing gun control activists of trying to "name and shame" honest small-business owners and singling out Brady for compiling misleading lists of "bad-apple" dealers. He cited a 1998 report by the A.T.F., which described gun tracing as a "starting point" for investigators to unravel a defendant's illegal behavior that "in no way suggests" the dealer's culpability.

But gun control activists say the Pennsylvania data, however incomplete, points to an inescapable policy conclusion: The A.T.F., an embattled and chronically understaffed agency responsible for overseeing 75,000 licensed dealers, needs to intensify its monitoring and oversight of the most troubled gun sellers. To that end, the Biden administration has proposed a 13 percent increase to the bureau's budget, to pay for 140 new agents and 160 new investigators to inspect gun dealers.

The House oversight committee [asked the A.T.F.](#) in 2019 for data on gun shops that had received warnings or recommendations that their licenses be pulled, including the name and location of the dealer, the violations identified, the recommendations by the inspector and what steps the bureau took after the inspection.

The A.T.F. has not yet provided that information, which the committee says it needs to complete its investigation, now two and a half years old, into the role that gun dealers play in the epidemic of gun crime.

Ms. Maloney's committee released its initial analysis of the data that the A.T.F. has provided, which included anonymized dealers, their gun sales and the number of those guns that had been traced back to crimes. It also shared how many of the documented gun crimes occurred within five years after the gun was sold.

The A.T.F. last released a large amount of similar data in 2000.

The bureau gave the committee six years' worth of anonymized gun trace data for the top five dealers in each state. It also provided anonymized data on gun sales for 12 selected dealers in a handful of states.

The committee found that three dealers sold significantly more crime guns than the others as a percentage of their average monthly gun sales.

Two gun shops in Georgia and Indiana — identified as “GA01” and “IN02” — presented an especially troubling picture: On average, about 10 percent of their monthly guns sold were used in crimes. GA01 sold more than 6,000 crime guns from 2014 to 2019, accounting for more than half of Georgia’s reported guns later recovered at crime scenes. About 7 percent of the monthly guns sold at a Michigan store identified as “MI01” were crime guns, according to the analysis by Ms. Maloney’s committee.

The committee also found that in Puerto Rico, crime guns bought outside the territory all came from Florida, indicating that guns could be moving in predictable corridors between parts of the country.

In July, the Justice Department created [five federal strike forces](#) aimed at gun traffickers who flood urban streets with illicit firearms. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said they would be overseen by U.S. attorneys in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Northern California and Washington, D.C., places identified as end points for significant gun-trafficking corridors.

The situation in Pennsylvania was somewhat different, according to the Brady analysis. Most of the crime guns recovered in Philadelphia, and to a lesser extent Pittsburgh, were sourced from stores inside the state. New York and other cities, by contrast, are often inundated with out-of-state guns.

In Philadelphia, several of the gun shops with the highest number of crime gun traces have already closed, or been shut down, after investigations by the A.T.F. found major problems with their record-keeping or a willful failure to stop the straw buyers.

But some of the retailers still operating in Philadelphia have had similar problems.

Over the past decade, more than 1,000 crime guns have been traced to Firing Line Inc., a gun store in South Philadelphia that federal inspectors have cited for failing to stop straw purchases, losing track of weapons, refusing to run timely background checks and a lack of reporting on suspicious buyers.

In 2017, after several warnings, A.T.F. officials concluded that the owner “failed to maintain accurate information,” but they allowed the shop to remain in business, in part, because inspectors must prove intent to shutter a licensed dealer. Since then, 399 new crime guns have been traced to the location, according to Brady.

The store’s owner, [who in 2020 shot and killed an intruder](#) during a break-in at the store, did not immediately return a request for comment.

While the vast majority of guns recovered in any given year are not linked to violent crimes, 30 weapons originally sourced to Philadelphia dealers were associated with homicides in 2020, according to Brady.

In addition, Philadelphia retailers have also been named in weapons trafficking cases brought by prosecutors in nearby Montgomery County — including a straw-purchasing spree by a man who had just turned 21, and monetized his clean criminal record to buy and sell 36 handguns, according to a [criminal complaint](#) filed in 2020.

From 2019 to 2021, three Philadelphia men bought and resold 37 weapons — three of them from Delia’s Gun Shop in the Torresdale section of the city, which was responsible for 2,644 traced guns. They bought three more from Frank’s Gun Shop, a nearby retailer linked to 451 crime guns from 2014 to 2020.

A woman identifying herself as a manager at Delia’s hung up when a reporter called for comment; the owner of Frank’s Gun shop did not immediately return a request for comment.

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HEADLINE	04/28 US arrests British Virgin Is. premier
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/us/british-virgin-islands-premier-arrested.html
GIST	The premier of the British Virgin Islands was arrested on Thursday in the Miami area on drug trafficking and money laundering charges, the authorities said.

According to a criminal complaint filed in the U.S. Southern District of Florida, Andrew Fahie, who is the elected head of government of the small territory of about 30,000, requested an upfront payment of \$500,000 to let cocaine slip through the territory en route to Miami and New York. He was charged with conspiracy to import at least five kilograms of a cocaine mixture and conspiracy to launder money.

The territory's director of ports, Oleanvine Pickering Maynard, and her son Kadeem Stephan Maynard, also face those charges, according to the complaint.

A man who presented himself as working for the Sinaloa Cartel, but who was a confidential source for the federal authorities, met with Ms. Maynard on March 20, according to the complaint.

The man told Ms. Maynard he needed help ferrying thousands of kilograms of cocaine from Colombia through Tortola, which is in the British Virgin Islands, according to the document. Ms. Maynard agreed to assist, and said Mr. Fahie would also be open to such an arrangement, according to the complaint.

On April 7, the confidential source met with Mr. Fahie, who requested the upfront payment to get the process started and said that Ms. Maynard could provide the licenses needed for the cocaine to slip through the ports, according to the complaint. The source then gave Mr. Fahie \$20,000 and said, "This is a good faith gift, to seal that we have an agreement," according to the document.

The source also proposed that the authorities could organize seizures of bad drugs and money by Mr. Fahie in the territory to throw off suspicion and make it look as if he were fighting drug trafficking, the document said.

"Fahie laughed and said the CS had thought of everything," the document said, referring to the confidential source.

Mr. Fahie, Ms. Maynard and Mr. Maynard could not immediately be reached and it was unclear who their lawyers were.

In a statement on Thursday, Anne Milgram, the administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, said that the arrests "should send a clear message."

"Anyone involved with bringing dangerous drugs into the United States will be held accountable, no matter their position," she said. "Today is yet another example of D.E.A.'s resolve to hold corrupt members of government responsible for using their positions of power to provide a safe haven for drug traffickers and money launderers in exchange for their own financial and political gain."

In an earlier statement on Thursday, Liz Truss, British foreign secretary, said she has spoken with the governor of the British Virgin Islands and that he would be holding an emergency meeting on the matter.

"I am appalled by these serious allegations," she said. "This arrest demonstrates the importance of the recently concluded Commission of Inquiry."

Ms. Truss was referring to an independent inquiry by the territory's governor, John Rankin, that began in January 2021 with the goal of reviewing the territory's governance and making recommendations for improvement.

The purpose of the continuing inquiry "is to establish whether there is evidence of corruption, abuse of office or other serious dishonesty that has taken place in public office in recent years, and if so what conditions allowed this to happen," [according to the British government](#).

The investigation, officials said, "has been launched, in part, in response to wide public concerns."

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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/people-started-crying-man-shot-in-attempted-carjacking-outside-senior-living-community
GIST	<p>"People started crying," said Darlene Storti, Executive Director of Northhaven Senior Living. "People came to me, 'what can we do? Is he ok?'"</p> <p>Kyle Akers works as a dietary supervisor at North-Haven Senior Living. He was shot Wednesday night while trying to stop his car from being stolen. It happened outside the senior living community.</p> <p>"I had people in the lobby crying today and what can we do?" Storti said. "How can we take care of Kyle? We love Kyle."</p> <p>Seattle police said the suspects got out of his car and take off. That's when Akers drove to Big 5 Sporting Goods one block over to get help. Pictures from their surveillance camera show him walking in to get help before he was sent to Harborview Medical Center for treatment.</p> <p>A day later it's still tough to take for Storti and others. She describes him as someone who is kind and funny. Part of his role is supervising staff that serves meals to the residents.</p> <p>"He tells us all the time, this is his home," Storti said. "He feels comfortable. This is what he loves to do. He loves the residents and we have over 200 residents just in the building."</p> <p>Storti said they have had two shootings in the area and while Akers is expected to come back to work, she still has her worries.</p> <p>"This could happen to anybody," Storti said. "Worrying about the staff coming and going, but also the residents who are coming and going. How do I protect them? Because this could happen to any of them."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Serial robber targets stores along I-5
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/serial-armed-robber-hitting-stores-all-over-i-5/QGA37UX6UVDIXG7ORMJU7R054E/
GIST	<p>Police from Auburn to Everett are searching for an armed robber who they say is responsible for multiple robberies at stores throughout Interstate 5.</p> <p>Detectives believe the same individual is responsible for the following robberies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 11 at 8:35 p.m. at a 7-Eleven in Mountlake Terrace • March 13 at 3:13 a.m. at a 7-Eleven in Auburn • March 19 at 8:10 p.m. at a Rite Aid in Shoreline • March 19 at 8:52 p.m. at a Rite Aid in Mill Creek • March 19 at 9:25 p.m. at a Walgreens in Everett <p>Law enforcement with the Mountlake Terrace Police Department, King County Sheriff's Office, Mill Creek Police Department and Everett Police Department are all investigating these incidents.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 WSP falls short DNA test deadline
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/wsp-dna-test-deadline/281-1a3db208-86b5-4159-aa33-123ba20dc647
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — The Washington State Patrol will not meet a deadline set by legislators involving the timely processing of DNA test kits.</p> <p>Under a law passed in 2019, the state patrol is supposed to process all kits involving DNA samples taken in rape investigations within 45 days, starting Sunday, May 1.</p>

"We're confident in saying that 90-95% of every new sample that comes in will be able to be turned around in that 45-day benchmark," said state patrol spokesperson Chris Loftis. "And we're confident it's only going to get better every single month."

Loftis said he expected to the state to be processing all tests within 45 days in "months, not years." The COVID-19 pandemic slowed the opening of the newly expanded crime lab in Clark County. The lab opened in June of 2020, in the early days of the pandemic. Equipment and personnel were slow to arrive, said Loftis.

"They weren't able to be delivered in the time frame we had thought because the actual models were directed to other labs to do COVID testing," said Loftis. "The server engineers who were going to calibrate them and do the programming ... they were diverted by COVID testing."

In 2018, the [state identified approximately 10,000 DNA test kits](#) that had not been processed, Loftis said. Some of the kits were sitting on shelves of police departments for years. Those kits were sent to crime labs in other states.

Loftis estimated the outstanding cases are now closer to 1,700. He expected those to be processed in a matter of months.

In 2019, on average, it took the state patrol 682 days to process a test, Loftis said. That's when Rep. Tina Orwall's bill, setting the 45-day benchmark, passed.

"We knew it was a big lift," said Orwall, D-Des Moines.

Considering all the issues caused by the pandemic, Orwall said she is satisfied with the progress made by the state patrol processing outstanding kits as well as speeding up the process for incoming ones.

"I know by the end of the year, that chapter will be closed. And thanks to our new tracking system, the high throughput lab, this will never happen again in our state where they'll sit on a shelf and be forgotten," Orwall said.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Pierce Co. homicide-domestic violence link
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/domestic-violence-rising-homicide-rate-pierce-county/281-19a60ddc-2c1e-43bd-8b59-e3f0b6d98317
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — Pierce County has had 36 homicides so far this year, already passing last year's total of 32.</p> <p>Sgt. Darren Moss of the Pierce County Sheriff's Department warned that if current rate of homicides continues, there could be up to 42 homicides this year in unincorporated Pierce County alone.</p> <p>But as concerning as that may be for law enforcement, another trend has emerged: domestic violence has been linked to a growing number of homicides in unincorporated Pierce County.</p> <p>The Crystal Judson Family Justice Center said they have gotten more calls from law enforcement to help with domestic violence cases.</p> <p>The level of violence in these cases has risen, according to the center's director, Craig Roberts. Many of the reasons can be linked back to stresses from the pandemic.</p> <p>"Given everything that we've gone through as individuals, and all those mitigating factors, it's not a shock," he said. "We've had the pandemic, the isolation, the loss of jobs and income, kids not going to school, being home 24/7. These are all factors that lead to increased violence."</p>

	<p>Phebe Brako-Owusu, therapist and CEO of 253 Therapy and Consult, says it was difficult for service providers to help victims during the pandemic.</p> <p>“A lot of support that was occurring in offices is happening on phones and on tablets and on computers, so there isn’t that privacy of being in the office like we used to, so a lot of folks are hesitant to get the help and support that they would need,” she said. “Just having a community and a society that can be there for people, they’re not necessarily getting that.”</p> <p>Owusu says some therapists have tried to use the tools available as best they could, such as using code words and picture messages to create a safe space for victims.</p> <p>Now as things open back up, Roberts hopes to get more calls to his center, because it means more people are getting the help they need.</p> <p>“If our numbers go up, that’s a good thing, it means that more people are coming and seeking services than have before,” he pointed out.</p> <p>Roberts went on to encourage anyone who needs help to reach out, because resources are available, and for more information, you can call (253) 798-4166.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Seattle CAO targets repeat offenders
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-city-attorney-community-court-repeat-offenders/281-a4827709-22a5-4a12-851c-a92c8521aaa0
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle City Attorney Ann Davidson sent a request to the Seattle Municipal Court asking that frequent offenders who meet the criteria for Davison's High Utilizer Initiative be excluded from Community Court.</p> <p>Davison's High Utilizer Initiative identified 118 individuals who are responsible for 2,400 criminal cases over the past five years in Seattle, according to a release from her office. Each person identified has 12 or more referrals from the Seattle Police Department to the City Attorney's Office within the past five years, and at least one referral in the past eight months.</p> <p>Criminal justice reform advocates have praised King County's community court system, which connects low-level misdemeanor offenders with housing assistance or drug treatment instead of jail time.</p> <p>However, Davison said the system isn't working for some candidates.</p> <p>"We've seen about 59 individuals with tens and tens of police referrals that had been going previously through community court, and the rate of reoffending is high," Davison said.</p> <p>Her office points to cases where offenders have repeatedly been arrested and charged with theft or assault, and have cycled through the "release first" aspect of community court multiple times.</p> <p>"This data shows this type of intervention fails to address their activity or to deter them from reoffending," Davison said.</p> <p>Now Davison is seeking to end a 2019 agreement with the courts regarding Community Court and "clarify how many chances" a repeat offender can have in the system.</p> <p>Davison is also seeking to classically prosecute "repeat, high-impact criminal activity." She said she made the formal request to the court after negotiations to change the system for frequent offenders went nowhere.</p>

	<p>Municipal court judges responded to Davison's request, saying they are still evaluating the proposal. A spokesperson said the court remains "committed to collaborating with the Seattle City's Attorney Office and the King County Department of Public Defense to ensure a viable Seattle Community Court Program."</p> <p>The statement went on to say the court will continue working with Davison's office and the Department of Public Defense to "identify how to move forward together and create a prioritized plan for people whose needs and issues are not being addressed and have not been addressed historically, by our criminal justice system."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Pierce Co. on track record year of violence
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260648737.html
GIST	<p>Thirty-six people have died by homicide in 2022 in Pierce County. The killings are more than double what they were at this time last year, keeping with a national trend of increased homicides since 2020.</p> <p>Of those 36 homicides, 17 occurred in Tacoma, and six were fatal police shootings. At this time last year, there had been 17 homicides in all of Pierce County, with nine in Tacoma.</p> <p>The rate of killings has shown few signs of slowing. On Tuesday, the county was on its longest streak of days without a homicide: 14. A review of the homicides in Tacoma shows that nearly all have occurred in neighborhoods south of Interstate 5 and state Route 16. And among cases that have been solved in the county, the most common reason for the homicide is domestic violence.</p> <p>Other violent crimes, including assault, robbery, sexual assault and arson are also seeing an uptick, according to data from Tacoma Police Department and the Pierce County Sheriff's Department.</p> <p>Since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States has seen a surge of homicides. Speaking to the News Tribune's Matt Driscoll last month, University of Miami criminology professor Alex Piquero said it's difficult to pinpoint the cause of the increase in violent crimes, but that factors such as rises in gun and alcohol sales, increases in opioid disorders, the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest and unemployment all factor in.</p> <p>2020 was a concerning year for homicides in Tacoma with 32 dead, the most the city had seen since 1994. Last year's killings tied that number.</p> <p>Although it's early in the year to know how the crime rate will shape up, the city is on track to record its highest homicide total since 1994, when Tacoma had 33 homicides.</p> <p>Nearly all of the homicides in the county were shootings (33). In others, a person was deliberately run over at a Spanaway drive-thru restaurant and a 2-year-old child died by abuse from her parents. The Pierce County medical examiner has not ruled on the cause of death in one case.</p> <p>Fourteen of the 36 homicides are unsolved. TPD has solved about 53 percent of its 15 homicides, not including police shootings. The Sheriff's Department has solved 54 percent of its 11 cases. The solve rates are above the national average. According to the Marshall Project, a nonprofit newsroom that covers the U.S. criminal justice system, the national homicide-clearance rate in 2020 was a little below 50 percent.</p> <p>In other types of crimes, data from Tacoma police shows the sharpest increases in incidents of robbery, arson, kidnapping and motor vehicle theft during the same time period in 2022 and 2021.</p> <p>The only offenses that were down over last year were incidents of forgery, fraud, drug violations, obscene material offenses, prostitution and violations of weapons laws.</p>

	<p>Tacoma Police Department is taking steps to try to address the rises in violent crime. In a presentation to city council last week, Chief Avery Moore went over his plan, which includes making police officers more visible and focusing resources on high crime areas of the city.</p> <p>The strategy also includes contracting with two criminologists at the University of Texas-San Antonio to help develop and evaluate the crime reduction plan.</p> <p>Further phases are still being developed, but Moore said they will be based on engaging with local and state partnerships as well as the use of “focused deterrence,” a crime strategy first used in Boston in the late 1990s to address youth-gang gun violence. It aims to change specific criminal behavior committed by a small number of repeat offenders.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Colorado inmate tests positive for avian flu
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/avian-flu-h5n1-colorado-inmate/
GIST	<p>A Colorado man has tested positive for the avian flu, also known as H5N1 flu. The man, who is younger than 40 and an inmate at a state correctional facility in Delta County, is largely asymptomatic, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment said Thursday, adding that the risk to the public is low.</p> <p>The man tested positive as a result of direct exposure to infected poultry at a commercial farm in Montrose County, according to the health department. He was working with poultry as part of a pre-release employment program "where participants have the opportunity to work for private employers and be paid a prevailing wage."</p> <p>The infected man only reported feeling fatigued, and has since recovered, according to a statement from the CDC. He is isolating and receiving the influenza antiviral drug oseltamivir, commonly known as tamiflu, per CDC guidance.</p> <p>Following advice from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Colorado Department of Agriculture, officials "euthanized and disposed of" the affected flock.</p> <p>Health officials said the H5N1 flu is unlikely to spread to other people, as avian viruses do not normally infect humans, nor do they spread from person to person. No instances of this H5N1 flu spreading among people have been reported, and there are no other confirmed human cases in Colorado or the United States, officials said. The CDC said spread of earlier H5N1 viruses between humans "have happened very rarely and have not led to sustained person-to-person spread."</p> <p>The CDC said in a statement Thursday it has been monitoring the avian flu in the U.S. since late 2021. H5N1 has been detected in commercial and backyard birds in 29 states, and in wild birds in 34 states.</p> <p>The only other known human case was reported in the United Kingdom in December 2021, according to the CDC.</p> <p>"We want to reassure Coloradans that the risk to them is low," Dr. Rachel Herlihy, state epidemiologist at the health department, said in a statement. "I am grateful for the seamless collaboration between CDC, Department of Corrections, Department of Agriculture, and CDPHE, as we continue to monitor this virus and protect all Coloradans."</p> <p>The flu is usually spread among wild birds and poultry when the animals "shed flu viruses in their saliva, mucous, and feces," the health department said.</p> <p>Health officials said people should avoid sick or dead birds. Those who handle sick or dead birds should wear gloves and wash their hands with soap and water.</p>

	The health department added it is safe to eat properly handled and cooked poultry and poultry products. Poultry and eggs should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit in order to kill bacteria and viruses, including H5N1 viruses.
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HEADLINE	04/28 Struggle to find food, shelter in Haiti
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/20-dead-thousands-flee-homes-gangs-battle-haiti-84362135
GIST	<p>PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Heavy gunfire echoed Thursday in a once quiet neighborhood in Haiti's capital that has become ground zero in a gang fight that has killed at least 20 people, injured more than a dozen and forced thousands to flee their homes this week.</p> <p>Parents grabbed children by the hands as they balanced bags on their heads with the few belongings they could salvage after gang members ousted them from their homes.</p> <p>The fighting raging in four districts on the northern side of Port-au-Prince is a new peak in the criminal violence that has surged as increasingly powerful gangs try to control more territory during the political power vacuum left by the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.</p> <p>"I left everything behind," said Kerline Brutus, 35, who fled with her three children from one of the neighborhoods, Butte Boyer, a long quiet district where she has lived more than 25 years.</p> <p>She had to abandon her 96-year-old paralyzed father because she couldn't carry him. "I don't know how he's doing, if he's still alive," she said.</p> <p>Brutus said she keeps praying for him as she struggles to find shelter for her family. They have been huddling under the front step of a store with an awning that protects them from the rain, but she is looking for more permanent shelter.</p> <p>"It seems like this country has no authorities. No one came here to see us. We don't know how long we're going to be here or how long this is going to last," she said, echoing the frustration of Haitians over the rise in violence.</p> <p>Some 100 police officers carrying automatic weapons spread through the neighborhood checking people and their belongings, but barrages of gunfire rang out nearby.</p> <p>The administration of Prime Minister Ariel Henry has struggled to improve security even as it gets help from the international community to boost an understaffed and underfunded police department.</p> <p>Defenders Plus, a local human rights group, accused political leaders of being careless, incompetent and unable "to ensure one of the basic functions of any State: the security of its territory."</p> <p>It also demanded that authorities "assume their responsibilities in order to guarantee the population's right to life and security."</p> <p>Government officials did not return calls for comment.</p> <p>Authorities said the fighting between a gang known as Chen Mechan (Bad Dog in Haitian Creole) and the 400 Mawozo gang, which kidnapped 17 U.S. missionaries last year, began Sunday. The 400 Mawozo gang is considered the more powerful of the two and has long been accused of kidnapping and other violent acts.</p> <p>Government officials have said they worry the violence in that area will worsen and that people will continue to flee.</p>

“This almost cost me my life because they broke into my home and had me lay on the ground,” said Melissa Vital, 25, who has a 3-year-old daughter. “Luckily my boyfriend wasn’t there because they were killing men that they found in houses.”

She said the gang members ordered her and her daughter to leave their home in Butte Boyer.

“I don’t know where to go right now,” Vital said, adding that she is feeling weak because she is still breastfeeding her daughter but hasn’t had much to eat. “I’ve been with the same clothes since Sunday.”

Thousands of Haitians affected by a surge of gang violence last year in the Martissan community in the south of Port-au-Prince are still living in crowded and unhygienic government shelters, and it isn’t clear where newly displaced families will go.

Emmanuel Piersaint, a coordinator with Haiti’s Civil Protection Agency, told The Associated Press that officials provided displaced families with toiletry kits and gave them dishes of spaghetti, rice and beans.

“We hope the situation will not worsen,” he said.

Authorities say the fighting in the Butte Boyer, Croix-des-Missions, Marecage and Mapou neighborhoods could block the main roads leading to Haiti’s northern region. Warring gangs already occupy the main road leading to Haiti’s south, making it difficult for aid to reach those affected by a deadly earthquake last year.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Mexico: kidnapped female soldiers freed
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/suspected-cartel-gunmen-abduct-female-soldiers-mexico-84382384
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Suspected drug cartel gunmen abducted two off-duty female soldiers at gunpoint for several hours Thursday, the Mexican army said.</p> <p>The commander of the army headquarters in the Pacific coast resort of Puerto Vallarta said the two women were vacationing there when they were kidnapped just after midnight.</p> <p>“They were kidnapped for the simple reason that they belonged to the army,” Gen. Vicente Pérez López said. “They had nothing to do with any operational issues.”</p> <p>The army said in a statement that the two were freed later Thursday, after about 15 hours in captivity. The statement did not say how the release took place.</p> <p>The two had rented a property in Puerto Vallarta and “were enjoying the beach ... on vacation,” Pérez López said, calling it “a cowardly act.”</p> <p>He said the kidnappers were believed to be members of a drug gang “because of the way in which they operated.”</p> <p>He said a search was launched by the army, navy and National Guard, including the use of helicopters.</p> <p>Pérez López identified the two as a sergeant posted as an office worker and a second lieutenant who teaches at an army school. The army employs very few civilians or outside contractors, and it staffs most services — from hospitals and schools to weapons factories — with its own personnel.</p> <p>Puerto Vallarta is dominated by the violent Jalisco drug cartel, which has often openly clashed with the military.</p>

	<p>In another incident Wednesday, a member of the quasi-military National Guard opened fire on a vehicle, killing one university student and wounding another.</p> <p>The shooting occurred in the violence-plagued state of Guanajuato, where authorities have been fighting drug cartels and thefts from government-owned fuel pipelines for years.</p> <p>The National Guard is controlled by — and largely recruited from — the army, though it is supposed to be a civilian force.</p> <p>The Guard said in a statement that one of its patrols was conducting a routine mission to protect pipelines, when they happened upon two vehicles that sought to drive off.</p> <p>The force said one guard member “unilaterally” got out of his vehicle and fired on one of the vehicles, killing a male student and severely wounding a female student. It said the guard member had been turned over to civilian prosecutors.</p> <p>Guanajuato Gov. Diego Sinhue wrote in his social media accounts that he condemned the shooting and called it an “excessive use of force.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Feds improperly questioned NYC shooter?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/alleged-subway-gunman-frank-james-improperly-searched-defense/story?id=84376359
GIST	<p>Federal agents improperly questioned alleged New York City subway shooter Frank James this week, directed him to sign certain documents and took multiple swabs of his DNA, defense attorneys said in a court filing Thursday.</p> <p>James, 62, allegedly set off a smoke grenade on a Manhattan-bound N train approaching 36th Street in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, before opening fire and shooting 10 people in what police called the worst disruption to the commute in New York since the Sept. 11 attacks.</p> <p>On Tuesday, without alerting his lawyers, FBI agents entered his cell at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn "questioned him, took multiple buccal swabs of his DNA, and directed him to sign certain documents," according to a letter to the court from Mia Eisner-Grynberg and Deirdre von Dornum of the Federal Defenders of New York.</p> <p>"Contrary to standard practice, the government committed this intrusion absent advance notice to counsel, depriving us of an opportunity to be heard or to be present. Neither did the government provide subsequent notice to counsel. The agents did not provide Mr. James with a copy of the warrant or a receipt, in violation of Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure," the letter said.</p> <p>The attorneys said the government failed to explain why it deviated from standard procedure and only provided a copy of a search warrant when the attorneys asked after the fact. They accused the government of violating James' constitutional rights.</p> <p>The government defended itself Thursday, saying it was authorized and within its rights in its interactions with James.</p> <p>"Contrary to the defendant's hyperbole, his DNA was obtained pursuant to a judicially authorized search warrant and no violations of any of the defendant's constitutional rights occurred in the execution of the warrant," a letter from the DOJ to the Eastern District of New York said.</p> <p>The DOJ said the search warrant for the DNA swab samples was filed publicly on April 22. It also said it didn't force James to sign any documents nor did officials question him.</p>

	<p>It is the government's understanding that in the brief period required to take the buccal swab samples, the defendant was not questioned by and made no relevant statements to the law enforcement officers who executed the searchwarrant," the DOJ letter said. "The executing law enforcement officers also did not direct the defendant to sign any documents."</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York, which has charged James with one terror-related count, declined to comment.</p> <p>The defense attorneys said they would seek to suppress whatever statements James made to the agents this past Tuesday and asked the judge to order the government to turn over a copy of the affidavit that served as the basis for the search.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Florida: 3 prison officers charged w/murder
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/florida-correctional-officers-charged-murder-alleged-beating-inmate/story?id=84375746
GIST	<p>Three Florida correctional officers were arrested on murder charges for allegedly beating an inmate to death, while a fourth remains at large, authorities said Thursday.</p> <p>Christopher Rolon, 29, Kirk Walton, 34, and Ronald Connor, 24, were arrested Thursday following a monthslong investigation of the fatal incident at the Dade Correctional Institution in Miami-Dade County, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement said.</p> <p>They were arrested on multiple charges, including second-degree murder, conspiracy, aggravated battery of an elderly adult and cruel treatment of a detainee, jail records show. Attorney information was not immediately available.</p> <p>Additional information on the fourth correctional officer being sought by law enforcement was not provided.</p> <p>The incident occurred on the morning of Feb. 14, before the inmate was scheduled to be transferred to a correctional facility in Lake County, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which led the investigation into the death along with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office.</p> <p>After the inmate reportedly threw urine on an officer, he was placed in handcuffs and removed from his cell in the mental health unit, at which point the officers "began to beat him," the Florida Department of Law Enforcement said in a statement.</p> <p>"The inmate was beaten so badly he had to be carried to the transport van," the agency said.</p> <p>The inmate, whose name was not released by the agency, was placed in a compartment of the van alone. During a stop in Ocala, an over 300-mile drive from Dade Correctional Institution, he was found dead, authorities said.</p> <p>The inmate's death was caused by a punctured lung leading to internal bleeding, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. He also had injuries to his face and torso "consistent with a beating," the agency said.</p> <p>The incident initially led the Florida Department of Corrections to place 10 officers on administrative leave. One officer also resigned over it, the department said.</p> <p>"What happened in this case is completely unacceptable and is not a representation of our system or of Dade Correctional Institution as a whole," Florida Department of Corrections Secretary Ricky Dixon said in a statement Thursday. "The staff involved in this case failed, and as an agency we will not stand for this."</p>

	<p>The Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, which is prosecuting the case, is holding a press briefing Friday afternoon with the Florida Department of Corrections and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to share further details on the criminal charges.</p> <p>"Staff misconduct, abuse or criminal behavior have no place in Florida's correctional system," Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle said in a statement. "Inmates should not be subject to forms of 'back alley' justice which are actions in violation of Florida law."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Parkland shooter death penalty case
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/parkland-shooters-death-penalty-case-disarray-amid-judges/story?id=84368533
GIST	<p>Jury selection in the death penalty case of confessed Parkland school shooter Nikolas Cruz lapsed into disarray after potential jurors allegedly mouthed expletives and threats to the defendant in the courtroom and the presiding judge admitted committing a legal error that nearly derailed the process.</p> <p>Just days after Judge Elizabeth Scherer granted a motion by prosecutors to scrap jury selection in the high profile case and start from scratch, she reversed her order on Wednesday upon hearing a counter argument from Cruz's lawyers. The case began on April 4 in Broward County, Florida.</p> <p>Scherer admitted that she made an error back on April 5, the second day of jury selection, when she asked would-be jurors if they could follow the law if picked to serve on the case and then dismissed 11 who said they could not.</p> <p>David Weinstein, a former federal and state prosecutor in Florida, told ABC News on Thursday that Scherer made a mistake by asking the question. He said her inquiries in the initial phase of jury selection should have been limited to questions about whether the potential jurors had a hardship that prevented them from serving on the case, which is expected to last four to six months.</p> <p>"That was all that they were supposed to be inquiring into," said Weinstein, who is not involved in the case but is following it closely.</p> <p>He said the more probing questions like the one the judge asked should have been reserved for the voir dire phase of jury selection, when prosecutors and defense attorneys are given the chance to grill jury candidates on their answers.</p> <p>"Each side is given the opportunity to rehabilitate you, to ask, 'When you said you couldn't follow the law, did you really understand what the judge was asking you? What do you mean you can't follow the law?'" Weinstein said.</p> <p>Defense attorneys filed a motion accusing the court of committing double jeopardy and asked that the death penalty phase of the case be declared a mistrial and that Cruz be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.</p> <p>To remedy her mistake, Scherer reversed her earlier ruling and ordered that the 11 jurors she dismissed to be summoned back to court on Monday so lawyers can question them about their answers.</p> <p>In her earlier ruling, Scherer also said she was dismissing the 243 would-be jurors who had already been qualified for a pool to seat the jury from. That decision has also been reversed.</p> <p>Scherer said 20 jurors, including eight alternates, will eventually be chosen to recommend whether the 23-year-old Cruz, who has pleaded guilty to 17 counts of murder and 17 counts of attempted murder, will be sentenced to death or to life in prison without the possibility of parole.</p> <p>The judge's mistake wasn't the only controversy to erupt this week in the case.</p>

	<p>On Tuesday, a potential juror disrupted the proceedings when he entered the courtroom and allegedly mouthed expletives and threats to Cruz, who was seated at the defense table. The outburst apparently inspired other would-be jurors in the courtroom to make similar threats to Cruz and prompted bailiffs to press Cruz against a wall to protect him.</p> <p>Scherer described that particular group of jury candidates as "belligerent" and dismissed them all.</p> <p>Cruz pleaded guilty in October to committing the 2018 Valentine's Day massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. During the hearing attended by loved ones of the 17 he killed, Cruz said he wished it was up to the survivors of the shooting to determine whether he lived or died.</p> <p>"I'm very sorry for what I did," Cruz said at his plea hearing. "I can't live with myself sometimes."</p>
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